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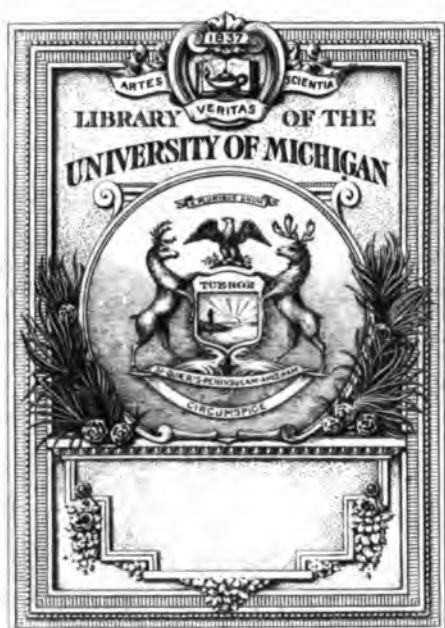
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Biographical and  
Critical Studies

James Thomson (B.V.)







**BIOGRAPHICAL AND  
CRITICAL STUDIES**



# BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL STUDIES

BY

JAMES THOMSON

("B. V.")

AUTHOR OF "THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT," ETC.

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## P R E F A C E

WHEN publishing, last year, the first collected edition of the poems of James Thomson, I expressed a hope that it might soon be followed by a collection of his prose writings. I hoped then that there would have been a somewhat more general welcome accorded to the poems than has proved to be the case, for though the zeal of Thomson's admirers leaves nothing to be desired, it must yet be confessed that their number is at present rather limited. It is, moreover, rather unfortunate that to the general public he is still known almost exclusively as the author of "The City of Dreadful Night," so that it is difficult to gain a hearing for him except as a poet, notwithstanding the remarkable excellence of his prose writings. It is the desire, however, of his publishers to issue a collected edition of his prose works which shall comprise all that seems to be of permanent value in his remains. Such an edition, if carried out as intended, will extend to four volumes of original matter, and another containing his translations from Leopardi and Novalis. The book now issued is intended to form the first volume

of the proposed collection. But it must be understood that it will depend upon the reception of the present volume whether the publication of the remainder is proceeded with. The publishers, who, sixteen years ago, gave Thomson his first chance of appealing to the book-buying public, are anxious to see their work crowned during their lifetimes by a definitive edition of his works; but if it should prove that there is no corresponding desire on the part of the reading public for such an edition, they can hardly be censured if they do not proceed with their enterprise. If not now, the work will some day be accomplished; and it will matter little, so the work be done, by whom it is carried to completion.

The contents of the present volume consist chiefly of writings which have not hitherto been collected. The only articles included here which have previously appeared in book-form are the essays on "The Poetry of William Blake" and on Shelley. I have included these, not only because I think they show Thomson at his best as a critic, but also because I was anxious to bracket them and the article on Garth Wilkinson ("A Strange Book") together. The three essays, though written at wide intervals of time, will be found to be linked together, not only because they deal with the fundamental questions of poetical criticism, but because they unfold with a fair degree of completeness the views of a true poet upon the methods and

aims of his art. It will be well, however, to remember that the essay on Shelley was written when the author was still in his early manhood, and it may therefore require some slight allowance to be made on that account.\* But the essays, taken together, are not more remarkable for their eloquent expression than for their entire sanity of judgment and sureness of appreciation of the distinctive qualities of the three poets, so like in some respects, and yet so entirely different in others. The article on Garth Wilkinson will be found to be of peculiar interest, since it is, so far as I know, the only article dealing with that remarkable writer which is in any degree adequate or satisfactory.

As to the other contents of this volume, it will be well for the reader to bear in mind that the articles on Rabelais, Saint-Amant, Ben Jonson, John Wilson, and James Hogg, are reprinted from *Cope's Tobacco Plant*. This will account for the rather frequent references in those articles to the subjects which would naturally interest the readers of that periodical. Almost one-half of the article on Ben Jonson, indeed, is devoted to the references in that author's writings to the practices of smoking and snuff-taking. Possibly this portion of the essay might have been omitted

\* Thomson would not in later life have spoken of Carlyle's "French Revolution" as "the unapproached model of history," nor would he have spoken in quite such enthusiastic terms of Ruskin and Emerson as he employs in this early essay.

without much loss ; but looking at the curiosity of the subject, and its illustrations of Jonson's character and manner of workmanship, I was very unwilling to sacrifice it. All smokers will be interested by it ; and as they far out-number (amongst the male sex, at the least) non-smokers, I need make no further apology for its retention.

I have experienced no small degree of pleasure in editing this volume ; and now that my task is completed, I feel assured that the book is one which will receive a warm welcome from its fit audience—few or many, as the case may be. So much good English, good sense, good criticism, and keen thinking is not often to be found within the covers of a single book. I will not assert that it contains Thomson's finest work in prose ; for, no doubt, the volume called "Essays and Phantasies," which was published during his lifetime, is his greatest achievement outside his verse. Nevertheless, it contains some things as fine as he ever accomplished ; and if here and there a suspicion may arise that some passages were not so much the outcome of the author's peculiar temperament as of the struggle for subsistence, the candid and generous critic will hasten to make the proper allowances for them. But such passages are, after all, very few ; and Thomson's task-work, however distasteful it may have been to him, was always honestly and conscientiously performed.

I have already enumerated the articles in this volume which appeared originally in *Cope's Tobacco Plant*. As for the rest, the articles on Shelley (with the exception of the review of Symonds' "Life of Shelley," which appeared in *Cope*) and on William Blake first appeared in the *National Reformer*; the "Notes on the Genius of Robert Browning" in the *Transactions of the Browning Society*, Part I.; the article on "The Ring and the Book" in the *Gentleman's Magazine*; and the notice of "Pacchiarotto" in the *Secularist*. I have to thank the editors or proprietors of these various papers and periodicals for the permission kindly given to reproduce the various articles.

BERTRAM DOBELL.



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# BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL STUDIES

## RABELAIS

### I

FRANÇOIS RABELAIS was born about 1483 (the date is not certain), at Chinon, in Touraine, that fat and quiet province of subtle-witted, easy-going people, whose character has been so sympathetically described by the great Balzac (as in *L'Illustre Gaudissart*); for Balzac, like Descartes and Paul Louis Courier, was a son of the same soil, and, like Rabelais and Paul Louis, copiously illustrated his native province. Rabelais calls Touraine the garden of France, and Chinon a most famous, noble, and ancient town, the first in the world; and in Book v., chap. xxxv. of his great work, we read: "This made me say to Pantagrue that this entry put me in mind of the painted cellar, in the oldest city in the world, where such paintings are to be seen, and in as cool a place. 'Which is the oldest city in the world?' asked Pantagrue. 'It is Chinon, sir, or Cainon, in Touraine,' said I. 'I know,' returned Pantagrue, 'where Chinon

lies, and the painted cellar also, having myself drunk there many a glass of cool wine ; neither do I doubt but that Chinon is an ancient town—witness its blazon. I own it is said twice or thrice—

“ Chinon,  
Little town,  
Great renown,  
On old stone  
Long has stood ;  
There's the Vienne, if you look down ;  
If you look up, there's the wood.”

But how,' continued he, 'can you make out that it is the oldest city in the world? Where did you find this written?'—'I have found it in the Sacred Writ,' said I, 'that Cain was the first that built a town ; we may then reasonably conjecture that he the first from his own name named it Cainon ; as, following his example, all other founders of cities have named them after themselves.'” An etymology as clear as Swift's tracing of bees and cobblers to the Hivites and the Shuities. The father kept an hotel called the “Lamprey,” in which was the painted cellar (or cellar of pints, in one reading) so lovingly referred to, and had also a vineyard famous for its white wine ; so that the jolliest of men was born amidst congenial surroundings. Being the youngest of several sons, he was destined for the Church, and his education was begun in the Benedictine abbey of Seillé or Seuillé, close at hand. He was afterwards removed to the convent of La Basmette at Angers, where he rapidly progressed in learning, and made friends who were to stand him in good stead throughout his life, including André Tiraqueau, afterwards lieutenant-

general of the bailiwick of Fontenay-le-Comte ; Geoffroi d'Estissac, who became Bishop of Maillezais ; and the four brothers du Bellay, who rose to high rank in the Church and State, one of them being made cardinal. When old enough for the novitiate, he unfortunately left the learned Benedictines for the ignorant and bigoted Franciscans, entering their convent of Fontenay-le-Comte in Lower Poitou, where he took priest's orders in 1511. He carried on his studies with the passionate ardour which distinguished the great scholars of the Renaissance, having but one friend in the convent, Pierre Amy, who shared them with him, and who, like himself, corresponded in Greek with Budæus. The other monks regarded with profound distrust and antagonism this devotion to profane learning, and especially to the diabolical Greek ; and at last the superiors made a visit of inquisition to the cells of the two students, and the chapter confiscated their Greek books and manuscripts. Then, it is said, Amy was frightened or won over to be the accuser of Rabelais, though of what he accused his old friend is not recorded—perhaps of heresies uttered confidentially. It is certain that soon afterwards Rabelais was put *in pace*—that is to say, condemned to imprisonment for life in an underground dungeon of the monastery, on a diet of bread and water : the Church had always such honey-sweet names for its most atrocious cruelties ! Thus, when an heresiarch like Giordano Bruno was handed over to the secular power to be burnt alive, the ecclesiastical formula ran : “To be punished as gently as possible, and without effusion of blood.” Many reasons have been given for the

terrible sentence passed on Rabelais, in addition to whatever may have been betrayed by Amy; but they are all legendary rather than historical, and seem to have been suggested by the drolleries of his great work, not begun till long afterwards, rather than by anything known of him during these years of solitary and strenuous study. Thus, he is said to have mingled with the wine of the monks certain anti-aphrodisiacs, or, on the contrary, certain aphrodisiacs; to have got drunk at a village festival and preached debauchery to the peasants, giving them a fearful example by songs and dances and lewd antics; to have posed himself in the place of the statue of St. Francis in the porch of the church of the convent, and by suddenly laughing and gesticulating, made the poor people kneeling before him cry out, "A miracle!"—" *On ajoute qu'il poussa l'irrévérence et le sacrilège jusqu' à les asperger d'une eau qui n'était rien moins que bénite.*"

He was rescued from this living burial by some of his powerful friends, particularly André Tiraqueau, who by his office had a certain authority over the convent, and who had to force the gates in order to release him. By the mediation of the same staunch friends he obtained, in 1524, an indulgence from Clement VII., permitting him to pass into the order of St. Benedict, to enter the Abbey of Maillezais under his friend Geoffroi d'Estissac, to assume the habit of a regular canon, and, notwithstanding his previous vow of poverty, to hold any Church livings he might obtain as a Benedictine. He was now forty years of age, and the best years of his life, all his young manhood, had been immured amongst the

most superstitious, fanatical, unlettered, and inert of monks. One shudders to think of what that great intellect and genial heart must have endured in such society. Only his unquenchable thirst for knowledge and his marvellous animal spirits could have sustained him. We shall not be surprised to read in his books the most bitter contempt and abhorrence for monks and monkery. Released thus, at length, he soon threw off the regular habit and assumed that of a secular priest, attaching himself to d'Estissac, who allotted him the income of a secretaryship, and undertook to provide him with a benefice when occasion should offer. He could now pursue his studies in peace (not *in pace*), with the advantages of a select society of liberal scholars and scholarly men of the world. He soon made the acquaintance of the leading thinkers and writers more or less in sympathy with the Reformation, or in revolt against the old orthodoxy, such as Calvin, Clément Marot, and Bonaventure des Periers. He could not long remain on good terms with Calvin, who was just as bigoted and dogmatical, in his own way, as any of the most narrow-minded doctors of the Church. Rabelais was not the man to free himself from one set of dogmas in order to involve himself in another as stringent. He was essentially a sceptic and free-thinker, enthusiastic for all erudition and science, hating all intolerance. Henry Etienne, the famous printer and scholar, echoing Calvin, said: "Though Rabelais seems to be one of us, he often flings stones into our garden." Father de St. Romuald reports: "Some said he turned Lutheran, others that he turned Atheist." And Mr. Besant, in his article on

Rabelais in the "French Humourists," well remarks : "The controversies of the time, the endless disputes of the schools, the differences of churches—what were they to men who could feed on Plato, and roam over the flowery fields of ancient philosophy? What was it to them whether the bigot of Geneva, or the bigot of Rome, conquered? . . . The spirit of priesthood—*that* had been the enemy of philosophy in old times, and was its enemy in the new times; its fanaticism, its blind fear of knowledge, were their natural foes; the long chain of custom, the fetter which bound men's souls to decaying forms, was what they would fain, but could not, remove. Life might be cheered by the intercourse of scholars; but life with the common herd, with the so-called religious or so-called learned, was intolerable, ludicrous, stupid. As for the doctrines of the Church—well, they are good for the common people. Meanwhile, the great God reigns: He is like a sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere. The ministers of religion are its worst enemies: he who is wise will be tied by as few dogmas as may be, but he will possess his soul in patience." And again: "Some men there are who seem too great for creeds. If they remain in the Church wherein they were born, it is because in no other would they find relief from the fetters of doctrine, and because the main things which underlie Articles are common to all Churches, in which the dogmas are the accidents of time and circumstance."

After six free and happy years, divided between his native town of Chinon, where he had his home and the excellent vineyard of La Devinière, and the

Château de Legugé of his patron and friend d'Estissac, where he had his little chamber for study, Rabelais found it advisable to make a move. The clergy had prevailed on the Parliament of Paris to order rigorous measures against those holding, or suspected of holding, the new doctrines. Clément Marot, accused specifically of eating lard in Lent, and generally of want of faith, was imprisoned in the châtelet, which in one of his poems he describes as a hell, and a very foul one. Bonaventure des Periers was denounced as an atheist by an Abbé Sagon, for words spoken, in chat with other gentlemen, of Marguerite of Navarre, and narrowly escaped. Louis de Berquin, accused by the Sorbonne headed by Beda, in spite of the favour of the king and the vigorous defence of Buda, was condemned as a relapsed heretic, and first strangled in consideration of his noble birth, and then burnt along with his books in the Place de Grève, in 1529. Rabelais went off to Montpellier to pursue his studies in medicine, which he had already by himself carried much further than most doctors of the age, Montpellier being then the most famous medical school in Europe. Thus, a contemporary of Rabelais, Andrew Boorde, writes: "At last I dyd stay at Muntpiliior, which is the noblest universite of the world for phisicions and surgeons." (English Text Society; Extra Series, x.) He inscribed himself on the register, 16th September 1530, being then forty-seven years old, and, on account of the vast knowledge he brought with him, was received bachelor on the 1st November following. He lectured to large audiences on Hippocrates and Galen, correcting the Latin version in use by colla-



tion with a Greek MS. of his own. He had his amusements with his fellow-bachelors. In "Pantagruel" (iii., xxxiv.), Panurge says to Carpalim: "I have not seen you since you played at Montpellier, with our old friends, Anthony Saporta, Guy Bourgnier, Balthazar Noyer, Tolet, John Quentin, Francis Robinet, John Perdrier, and Francis Rabelais, the moral comedy of him who married a dumb wife." And Epistemon having sketched the plot, which was worked up by Molière in his *Médecin Malgré Lui*, adds: "I never laughed so much in my life as at that buffoonery" (*patelinage*, from the celebrated farce of *Patelin*, to which Rabelais frequently alludes). Some of those who acted with him became among the most eminent doctors of the university. Though but a bachelor, he was selected to plead with Chancellor Duprat for the privileges of Montpellier, which had been restricted. Arriving at Paris, he could not obtain an audience of the great man. Clothing himself in a long green gown and an Armenian bonnet, with spectacles attached to it, and with a huge inkstand at his girdle, he marched solemnly up and down in front of the Chancellor's residence. A crowd soon gathered, and the attention of Duprat was called to the outlandish masquerader. One of the household was sent to ask him who he was, and he answered, "I am the flayer of calves." A page was sent out to ask him what brought him to Paris; he replied in Latin. One of the gentlemen who knew Latin being brought, Rabelais answered him in Greek; and so with one after another, in Spanish, Italian, German, English, Hebrew, &c., just as he has made Panurge do in "Pantagruel," ii. 9. At length the Chancellor

ordered that he should be brought in, when he spoke so eloquently and wisely on the subject of his mission that all he asked for Montpellier was granted. His memory has been conserved there by a custom said to be still observed. They kept his collegiate dress, a gown of red cloth, with large sleeves and black velvet collar, bearing his initials embroidered in gold; and the bachelors put on this robe to pass their fifth examination, and when they took it off each retained a small piece as a relic. At the beginning of the seventeenth century it had become so short that it only reached to the waist, and a fresh one was substituted in 1610, which was again renewed in 1720.

Early in 1532 he quitted Montpellier without taking his doctor's degree, although he was thoroughly qualified, and afterward practised, and went to Lyons, where he assisted Etienne Dolet in bringing out various classical works. Here he published the second volume of the medical letters of Manardi, as well as a revised and corrected edition of the Latin version of various treatises of Hippocrates and Galen, and two forged Latin documents, by which he was deceived. Tradition says that he was incited to begin his burlesque "Gargantua" by the complaints of his bookseller that the medical books would not sell; but this is very doubtful, as it is recorded that they were several times re-published. At any rate, the first edition, or, rather, version of the "Gargantua" (for the second had important and, indeed, radical variations) appeared in 1532, under the imposing title of "The great and inestimable Chronicles of the great and enormous giant Gargantua, containing the genealogy, the greatness and strength of his body; also

the marvellous deeds of arms he wrought for King Arthur, as you will see in the sequel ; newly printed." Three hundred years elapsed before this book was definitely recognised for the first draft of the "Gargantua," as it appears in his works. The author called himself Alcofribas Nasier, an anagram of François Rabelais, Abstracter of Quintessence ; a pseudonym still preserved in the heading of the first and second books. Like "Don Quixote," his great work was begun simply as an extravagant burlesque of the romances of chivalry, very popular under Francis I., and, as with the masterpiece of Cervantes, the scope and intention of the book continually widened as it proceeded. This first part became at once immensely popular ; as he tells us himself in the prologue to Book ii., more copies had been sold in a couple of months than would be bought of the Bible in nine years. As to the manner in which it was written, he says : "In the composition of this lordly book I never wasted or employed any more or any other time than that allotted to my bodily refection, that is, to my drinking and eating." Early in 1533 appeared the first edition (also unknown to bibliographers until 1834) of what is now the second book, under the title of "Pantagrue : the horrible and terrific deeds and prowesses of the most renowned Pantagrue, King of Dipsodes, son of the great giant Gargantua. Newly composed by Master Alcofribas Nasier." At least three editions of this were published at Lyons in the same year, to one of which he added the "Pantagrueline prognostication, certain, veritable, and infallible, for the year 1533," burlesqueing the judicial astrology which had then multitudes of

believers. This he followed up by an Almanac for the same year, written with the same intent, and to which he put his own name, calling himself doctor of medicine and professor of astrology. He composed other Prognostications and Almanacs for subsequent years, of which but a few fragments are known.

In January 1534, Jean du Bellay, then Bishop of Paris, passed through Lyons on his way to Rome, having been called from England, where he was ambassador, in order to attempt a reconciliation between Henry VIII. and the Pope. He offered to take Rabelais as his physician, and the offer was joyfully accepted, Rabelais having long desired to see Italy and Rome, and being specially glad to go there in the suite of his old friend and college-mate, one of the most able and liberal-minded prelates of the period. Many doubtful stories are told of Rabelais' sayings and doings at Rome, and, indeed, no man has had more drolleries fathered on him. One of the many is, probably, grounded on fact. Clement VII. having promised to grant him any petition, he begged to be excommunicated, thus explaining the motive of his strange request: "Holy Father, I am French, and of a small town named Chinon, considered very subject to the faggot; they have already burnt there many worthy people, relatives of mine. Now, if your Holiness will excommunicate me, I shall never burn, and for this reason: In coming to Rome we stopped, on account of the cold, in a wretched hut; an old woman who tried to kindle a faggot for us and could not succeed, said it must have been excommunicated by the Pope's own mouth,

since it would not burn." He remained but six months in Rome, being recalled, as he states, by the king, perhaps as the bearer of some important communication from the ambassador. But during his short stay he had managed to learn the Arabic from a bishop, and to make considerable progress in collecting materials for a work on the topography and monuments of ancient Rome. On his return, it is related that he was brought to a stop at an inn at Lyons, for want of money to pay his bill and proceed, a sort of embarrassment which has become proverbial as the quarter of an hour of Rabelais. Wishing to remain unknown, in the interest of his errand, he disguised himself, and caused it to be declared to the chief doctors of the town that an eminent physician, having returned from long travels, desired to communicate his observations. Many came, to whom he discoursed long and learnedly. All at once, with a mysterious air, he secured the doors, and announced that he would reveal his great secret. "Here," said he, "is a most subtle poison that I have procured in Italy to deliver you from that tyrant the king and his family." He was seized, placed in a litter with a strong guard, and marched off to Paris—treated liberally on the way, at the public expense, as a prisoner of the highest importance. Led before Francis I., he threw off his disguise, resuming his natural voice and expression, and was immediately recognised by the king, who, thanking the Lyons notables for their zeal, graciously dismissed them, and kept Rabelais to supper, where he drank heartily to the health of the king and the prosperity of the loyal city of Lyons.

## II

Rabelais soon returned to Lyons, which he called the seat of his studies. Here, in 1534, he issued an edition of Marliani's "Topography of Ancient Rome," abandoning his own projected work on the subject. It was his last publication of simple and serious scholarship; thenceforward he devoted his pen altogether to the sublime mysteries of Pantagruelism. He was appointed physician to the Grand Hôpital, and pursued his studies in astronomy and anatomy, on one occasion dissecting and lecturing upon the corpse of a criminal before a large number of persons. In 1535 he brought out another satirical "Almanack and Pantagruelian Prognostication," and, of far more importance, the third and definite redaction of "Gargantua," in which he retained nothing of the first except the names, some few events, and a score of comic phrases or ideas. It was now entitled, "The inestimable Life of the great Gargantua, father of Pantagruel, composed of yore by the Abstracter of Quintessence; book full of Pantagruelism." What Pantagruelism is he tells us in the New Prologue to Book iv.: "*C'est certaine gayeté d'esperit conficte en mépris des choses fortuites*," which the English version renders: "a certain jollity of mind, pickled in the scorn of fortune."

It has been thought that Rabelais founded a secret society of Pantagruelists, with the twofold object of spreading the Reformation among the common people, and Epicureanism among the higher classes; while an eminent French scholar thinks that he was

Lutheran in the first book, and Epicurean only in the fifth, published after his death. If he did found a secret society, it was probably only as a club for wit and revelry, not for propagandism of any kind. It must be remembered that he was now over fifty years of age, and had outlived all his illusions, and the belief in such a propaganda would be a very youthful illusion indeed. The abbey of Thélème, so magnificently described in the last "Gargantua" (Book i., as we have it now), and in which all the arrangements are in direct contradiction to those of ordinary convents, is supposed to represent this new philosophy as conceived by Rabelais, Etienne Dolet, Bonaventure des Periers, Clément Marot, Maurice Sève, Lyon Jamet, and the most eminent men of the time. It is certain that Rabelais was very intimate with Dolet and Marot; but they were soon separated. Placards blaspheming the sacrifice of the Mass were posted about Paris in the night, and an image of the Virgin at the corner of a street was profaned. Francis I. declared that he would cut off his own arm if he knew that it was gangrened with heresy, and ordered the Parliament to proceed with vigour and rigour against all of dubious faith. Six Lutherans were burnt alive, in presence of the king and all the court. Marot heard that his papers and books had been seized in his rooms at Paris, and forthwith fled to Bearn, to the protection of the sister of Francis, his *Marguerite des Marguerites*, or Pearl of Pearls, the noble Marguerite of Navarre, patroness and protectress of all liberal thinkers and writers. Not feeling safe even with her, he went to Ferrara, and then to Venice; and, indeed, she did not pass un-

attacked herself, for Brantôme says, "The Constable de Montmorency, when in the greatest favour, speaking one day with the king, did not scruple to tell him that if he really meant to exterminate the heretics from his realm, he must begin with his court and those nearest him, naming the queen his sister." Dolet was imprisoned at Lyons until released by the influence of his protector, Pierre Duchâtel, Bishop of Tulle. Rabelais, who had satirised the monks and Catholicism in the last "Gargantua," hurried off to Italy in 1536. In Mr. Besant's words: "He chose the safest place in Europe for a man of heretical opinions—Rome." Jean du Bellay was still there on business of the king, and in high favour with the new Pope, Paul III., who had made him a cardinal; and Rabelais was again attached to his household, as physician, reader, secretary, and librarian. Rabelais, by the advice of his friends, addressed to the Pope a supplication for apostasy, in which, after confessing his sins against the Church, and particularly his flight from the convent of Maillezais, he besought full absolution for the past, with permission to resume the Benedictine habit and re-enter the monastery, and also to practise medicine wherever he pleased, but for charity, not payment, and using neither fire nor iron. By the intervention of some Roman cardinals, who loved his wit and learning more than they hated his heresies, he got all he asked for, and thus protected by the bulls of the Pope, could defy even the Sorbonne. However, he did not at once return to France, where the persecution was still hot, but remained at Rome till March 1537, when he was recalled to both Paris and Montpellier—to Paris to



occupy a benefice which Cardinal du Bellay had assigned him in the Abbey de St. Maur des Fossés, to Montpellier to take his degree of Doctor of Medicine. Sixteen letters, written by him during this sojourn to the Bishop of Maillezais, are extant, and appear in the English edition of his works (Bohn's; the translation by Sir Thomas Urquhart and Motteux), having been first published a hundred years after his death. He went direct to Montpellier, where he took his degree in May, being fifty-four years old, and gave public lectures on anatomy, &c., for about a year, although he was not a professor. L. Jacob, Bibliophile (Paul Lacroix), to whose very full Memoir, prefixed to his edition of Rabelais, I am much indebted, says, on the authority of Kuhnholz: "The faculty, nevertheless, placed his portrait among those of the professors, and this original portrait, which was painted about this time, represents Rabelais with a bearing noble and majestic, regular features, fresh and ruddy complexion, fine beard of a pale gold, intelligent (*spirituelle*) expression, eyes full of both fire and sweetness, air gracious though grave and thoughtful."

Rabelais seems to have then gone to Paris, where he practised medicine, but did not fulfil the other conditions of the Papal brief which gave him security, not renouncing the secular habit nor submitting to conventual discipline. The Cardinal du Bellay had returned to France, and obtained a well-deserved preponderance in the Royal Council, and he enjoined Rabelais to enter upon the functions of the canonry, in the convent of St. Maur des Fossés, to which he had been appointed. The other canons opposed his

admission, on the ground that he remained under the censure of the Church for apostasy, the bulls of absolution being cancelled by his non-compliance with their conditions. Accordingly, he had to address another application to the Pope, which, like the first, is extant, for confirmation of the previous absolution and indulgences. As it was recommended by the cardinal, and supported by friends in Rome, it seems to have been granted without difficulty; and Rabelais, assuming the Benedictine habit, installed himself, with his books and scientific instruments, in the said convent of St. Maur, where, more than a century after his death, his room was still shown to strangers, as was also, at Montpellier, the house he had lived in. He loved this residence, which, in his epistle to Cardinal de Chastillon, he terms "Paradise of salubrity, amenity, serenity, commodity, delights, and all honest pleasures of agriculture and country life." The Cardinal du Bellay, who also liked the place, equally favourable for study and health, erected a magnificent mansion there in the Italian style, adorned with sculptures and surrounded by gardens; and Rabelais was always a welcome guest. But he was not the man to confine himself to the convent when the Papal brief gave him permission to practise medicine, as a work of charity, wherever he pleased. He kept travelling about, sojourning now in one town, now in another; he visited the friends of his youth, Antoine Ardillon at Fontenay-le-Comte, Geoffroi d'Estissac at Legugé or l'Ermenaud, Jean Bouchet at Poitiers, André Tiraqueau at Bordeaux, where he had been appointed Councillor to the Parliament. He frequently stayed a while at Chinon, where he still had relatives.

The vineyard he seems to have lost at the death of his father, but the hotel of the Lamprey remained to him, and he reserved in it a modest room for himself, which was respected long after his death. In the editions of Le Duchat, we are told, there are several engravings showing the hotel and the room as they were at the end of the seventeenth century. But he lived most of all with one or other of the brothers Du Bellay, his old and leal comrades of the convent of La Basmette, and all distinguished men. Besides the cardinal, there were Martin du Bellay, Lieutenant-General of Normandy (and real King of Yvetot, by his marriage with Elizabeth Chenu, proprietor of that principality), who was then writing memoirs of his negotiations and campaigns; René du Bellay, Bishop of Mans, the youngest, an ardent student of the physical sciences; and Guillaume du Bellay, Seigneur de Langey, a great captain and diplomatist, who also was writing memoirs in Latin. In this work it has been supposed that he was assisted by Rabelais, who in his own name printed a work on the same subject (of which not a copy is known to exist), as appears by a quoted title: "Stratagems, that is to say Prowesses and Ruses of War of the Valiant and very Celebrated Chevalier Langey, &c. Translated from the Latin of Fr. Rabelais by Claude Massuan. (Lyons, 1542.)" Jean du Bellay, the cardinal, was not only a real statesman and powerful orator, but an elegant poet in Latin, and a large-minded man, interested in all matters of literature, science, and philosophy, and so liberal in his ideas that, Churchman and cardinal as he was, he corresponded with Melancthon on the most cordial terms. The beneficent genius of Panta-

gruelism was right bountiful to Rabelais when it secured him such life-long friends as these.

He was staying with Guillaume du Bellay, at the end of 1542, when the veteran, who was lieutenant-general of the armies of the king in Piedmont, being warned by his spies of a secret intrigue of Charles V. against Francis I., did not hesitate to start at once, in spite of his great age, his infirmities, and the rigour of the season, to acquaint the king with what was passing. On leaving Lyons, carried in a litter, since he was not able to ride on horseback, he soon felt so ill that he was compelled to stop, and knew that his end was at hand. His death and the circumstances attending it made a profound impression on Rabelais, who loved and esteemed him; it is spoken of three times in "Pantagruel," and always with an unmistakable seriousness. In Book iv., chap. xxvi., Epistemon says: "We have had experience of this lately at the death of that valiant and learned knight, Guillaume du Bellay, during whose life France enjoyed so much happiness that all the world had her in envy, all the world sought her friendship, all the world feared her. From the day of his death it has been the scorn of all the world for a very long time." And in chap. xxvii., Pantagruel himself first speaking: "'This we saw several days before the departure of that so illustrious, generous, and heroic soul of the learned and valiant chevalier of Langey, of whom you have spoken.'—'I remember it,' said Epistemon, 'and still my heart shudders and trembles within its membrane when I think of the prodigies, so various and horrific, which we saw plainly five or six days before his departure'; so that the lords D'Assier, Chemant, Mailly the one-

eyed, Saint Ayl, Villeneuve la Guyart, Master Gabriel, physician of Savillan, Rabelais, Cohnau, Massuan, Maiorici, Bullon, Ceren, called Bourgemaistre, François Proust, Ferron, Charles Girard, François Bourré, and many more friends, followers, and servants of the deceased, all dismayed, regarded each other in silence, without saying a word, but all indeed reflecting and foreseeing in their minds that soon France would be deprived of a chevalier so perfect and necessary to her glory and protection, and that the heavens claimed him as due to them by natural propriety.'” Mark the long array of honourable witnesses, all well known, and all named for legacies in the will of Du Bellay, Rabelais himself having fifty livres a year till such time as he should hold livings worth at least three hundred livres per annum. And again, in Book iii., chap. xxi., the noble Pantagruel, speaking here also: “I will but remind you of the learned and valiant Chevalier Guillaume du Bellay, late Lord of Langey, who died on the hill of Tarana, the 10th of January, in the climacteric year of his age [the sixty-third], and of our computation 1543, according to the Roman reckoning. The three or four hours before his death he employed in vigorous speech, tranquil and serene in mind, predicting to us what in part we have since seen come to pass, and in part we expect to come; although at the time these prophecies seemed to us somewhat incredible and strange, as we discerned no present cause or sign portending what he foretold.” These serious testimonies of a writer who was anything but superstitious, and who burlesqued the astrologers with infinite scorn, are certainly trustworthy. He perhaps wrote the epitaph—

“ Ci gît Langey, dont la plume et l'épée  
Ont surmonté Cicéron et Pompée.”

We know that he was on the most friendly terms with the noblemen and gentlemen he names, both before and after the death of their lord. The bequest to him seems to show either that a canonry at St. Maur was worth very little, or that he was not then drawing its income. It appears that René du Bellay gave him a living—that of St. Christophe de Jambert—whose duties he performed by deputy.

Meanwhile the public was impatient for the long-promised continuation of “Pantagruel.” It is probable that his friends dissuaded him from bringing it out, in view of the terrible judgments given by the Parliament of Paris against heretical books and their authors. Clément Marot, whose return from exile had been procured by Marguerite of Navarre, had to take refuge in Geneva in 1543, the Sorbonne scenting heresy in his popular version of the Psalms, long used in the Calvinistic Churches. It was the translation to which Browning makes Ronsard allude—

“ And whose faculties move in no small mist  
When he versifies David the Psalmist.”

Des Periers is said to have committed suicide about 1544, rather than fall into the hands of the Church. Etienne Dolet in 1546 was condemned, as a relapsed atheist, to be put to the torture, then hanged, then burned together with his books, with the thoughtful proviso that if he made any scandal, or uttered any blasphemy, at the place of execution, his tongue should be cut out and burned first. Yet in this very year Rabelais ventured to publish his third book, with

its mordant satire of theologians and legists. At first sight the act appears audacious to the verge of frenzy, when it was criminal to render the Gospels and Psalms into the vernacular; when praying to God in French was a crime punished with the gibbet and the stake; when Francis I. had declared that he would cut off his own arm if he knew it to be gangrened with heresy. It is true that he had powerful protectors, but so had Berquin, and likewise the special favour of Francis; yet all had not availed to save him. But, most wonderful of all, the friends of Rabelais actually succeeded in getting the royal authority and privilege for this third book valid for ten years from its date, which license we can still read. He is supposed to have been chiefly indebted for it, in addition to the Du Bellays and D'Estissac, to Pierre du Châtel, Bishop of Tulle, almoner and reader to the king, and a secret supporter of the Protestants, and to Odet, Cardinal de Chastillon (brother of Admiral de Coligny), who subsequently avowed himself a Huguenot, and married in his pontifical robes. To crown his hardihood, Rabelais put his own name to this book, calling himself Doctor of Medicine and *calloïer* (reverend father) *des isles Hieres*, adding: "The above-named author begs his benevolent readers to reserve their laughter till the seventy-eighth book." In this book he abandons the romances of chivalry, the giants with their horrible and dreadful deeds, and his native Touraine. The burlesque has become satire; for local allusions we have general. He passes in review the leading professions embodied in typical personages—the theologian, the physician, the legist, the philosopher,

delivering themselves on the great question whether Panurge ought to marry or not. With all the fun these are not mere caricatures, but admirable intellectual studies by the greatest and best-informed intellect of the age. He introduces it by some lines to the spirit of Marguerite of Navarre, although she did not die until two years later. In the Prologue he challenges his enemies with infinite scorn: "Back with you, bigots! To your sheep, mastiffs! Out of this, hypocrites, in the devil's name, *hay!* Are you still there? I renounce my part of Papimanie if I grip you. Grr, grrr, grrrrr." There was a furious outcry against him from the monks and the theologians. Council was held at the Sorbonne, the book was strictly examined, and enough was found in it to condemn the author twenty times over. Especially in chapters xxii. and xxiii., the word *asne* (*âne*), "a jackass," was found three times for *asme* (*âme*), "soul." The first passage reads: "May his jackass go to thirty thousand basketfuls of devils;" the second: "May his jackass go to thirty thousand cartloads of devils;" the third: "At any rate, if he loses body and life, let him not damn his jackass." Rabelais, in the Epistle to Monseigneur Odet, Cardinal de Chastillon, dated January 1552, prefixed to the fourth book, coolly declares that the one word was thus put for the other three times running through the fault and negligence of the printers! Many an author's burden has been rejected on that long-suffering class, but never more audaciously than in this instance. As the book was protected by the royal authority, the Sorbonne could not impeach it without the permission of the king,



which they accordingly requested. Francis had not read the book; "but now," as Rabelais tells us in the above-mentioned epistle, "having, by the voice and pronounciation of the most learned and faithful reader of this kingdom [Pierre du Châtel, already named] heard and listened to the distinct reading of these books of mine (I say mine, because some false and infamous ones have been maliciously laid to my charge), he found no suspicious passage; and he had in horror some eater of serpents who founded mortal heresy on an *n* put for an *m* by the fault and negligence of the printers. And so had his son, our so gracious, virtuous, and blessed King Henry, whom may God long preserve to us! So that, for me, he granted you privilege and particular protection against my calumniators."

### III

In 1547 or 1548 he published, by itself, a Prologue to a fourth book of "Pantagruel," now known as the Old Prologue, for he wrote a new one for the book when issued. In this first Prologue, which is not given in the English version, he thanks his friends and admirers, "the most illustrious tipplers," for a present they had made him, being a richly ornamented flask of silver in the form of a breviary, with indications what wines he should drink at the several hours of prayer, this being his favourite style of devotion. These friends were probably the Pantagruelists of the court—for, as an old writer says, everybody began to cultivate Pantagruelism—and,

doubtless, comprised the famous Pleiad of poets, Ronsard, Baïf, and the rest, who, in the celebrated orgie of Arcueil, renewed the antique rites of Bacchus, offering to Jodelle, whose classical tragedy of "Cleo-patra" had been acted with success before Henry II. and his court at Rheims, a he-goat crowned with flowers, chanting Evohe, reciting dithyrambs, and pouring libations of wine in honour of all the deities of Olympus. Meanwhile, more was expected of him than drolleries and satires: the philosophers hoped for a serious work, sceptical or atheistic; the reformers for a solemn declaration in their favour. However, the Calvinists joined the Romanists in denouncing his books with true theological rancour. He soon afterwards went to Rome a third time with the Cardinal du Bellay, who, having lost his credit by the death of Francis I. and accession of Henry II., resigned his offices, which fell to the Cardinal of Lorraine. Beroalde de Verville, in his facetious *Moyen de Parvenir*, or "Way to get on in the World," tells us a story of this time, which I give for what it is worth: many think it true. "The Cardinal du Bellay, to whom Rabelais was physician, being ill of a hypochondriac humour, it was decided by the learned doctors in consultation, that an aperitive decoction must be made for monseigneur. Whereupon Rabelais goes out, leaving these gentlemen to finish their babbling to better use up money. He makes place in the middle of the court a tripod on a large fire, and on this a cauldron full of water, into which he threw all the keys he could find, and stirred the keys with a stick to make them boil well. The doctors having come down, and asking what he was

about, he replied: 'Gentlemen, I carry out your prescription, for nothing can be more aperitive than keys; and, if you are not content, I will send to the arsenal for some pieces of cannon to make the last opening.'" Besides being physician, he seems to have been astrologer, great as was his contempt for the judicial astrology. Catherine de Medicis had introduced this pretended science into France, and it had become the fashion for every one who could afford it to have his horoscope drawn, and every great personage had an astrologer in his suite. It is certain that he published, though no exemplar is known to exist, an "Almanack and Ephemerides for the Year of Our Lord 1550, composed and calculated for all Europe, by Master François Rabelais, physician-in-ordinary to Monseigneur the Most Reverend Cardinal du Bellay. Here are found, at the end of each month, the planets of infants, both male and female, and to which they are subject." It is evident from this title that he treated the matter with apparent seriousness, however ironically.

The cardinal and the French ambassador gave a grand mimic siege, followed by a Gargantuan banquet, in honour of the birth of a son to their king, and also of his mistress, Diane de Poitiers, very appropriately represented by the chaste goddess after whom she was named. Rabelais took part in this, probably assisting in its invention, and wrote an account of it, which was sent to Charles de Lorraine, Cardinal de Guise, the favourite minister of Diane, who had it printed. She was grateful for the flattery, but the one cardinal feared the other too much to permit his return. Rabelais, however, reaped his reward in a

privilege of the king, dated 1550, protecting not only the books already published but also the sequel to "Pantagruel," yet to see the light. This privilege distinctly states that Rabelais had also published several works in Greek, Latin, French, and Tuscan; but of these, other than those already mentioned, nothing is known. Thus secured against religious persecution, he was recalled to France, and was thenceforward in great measure attached to the powerful house of Lorraine, while faithful to his old protectors, the Du Bellays, who remained his steadfast friends. The Cardinal de Guise had just bought from the Duchess d'Etampes, who had been mistress of Francis I., the fine estate of Meudon, where, it being near Paris, he could reside with his brother, Henri de Lorraine, Duke de Guise, without remitting attendance at the court and council of the king. Cardinal du Bellay, as Bishop of Paris, had the vicarage (*cure*) of Meudon in his gift, and hastened to appoint to it Rabelais, thus gratifying the Lorraines as well as himself; the vicar (*curé*) in possession, of course, resigning at a hint from such great men, and being presumably indemnified with some other benefice. Accordingly, on the 19th January 1551, Rabelais was inducted vicar of the parish church of St. Martin de Meudon by the Bishop of Trèves, vicar-general of the Cardinal du Bellay; and, as Mr. Besant remarks, he has since been generally known as Curé of Meudon, though he was this but two years out of a life of seventy, he being sixty-eight when appointed. He now resolved or ventured to publish the fourth book of "Pantagruel," more daring in its satire and scepticism than any of the

preceding. In his Dedicatory Epistle to his old protector, the Cardinal de Chastillon, dated Paris, 28th January 1552, he declares, with that coolness of consummate audacity which must have largely helped to save him when weaker men were lost: "But the calumny of certain cannibals, misanthropes, and laughterless fools (*agelastes*) had been so atrocious and unreasonable against me, that it had vanquished my patience, and I had intended not to write a jot more. For one of the least of their slanders was that all my books are stuffed with heresies, though they could not show a single one in any passage. Of joyous fooleries, free from offence to God and the king, yes: they are the unique subject and theme of these books; of heresies, no; if not perversely, and against all usage of reason and common language, interpreted into what I would rather suffer a thousand deaths, were it possible, than have thought; as who should interpret bread, stone; fish, serpent; egg, scorpion." Yet, in this fourth book, he not only mercilessly derided the monks as before, but also the fasts of the Church, the Court of Rome, the Council of Trent, the authority of the Pope, and even (chap. xxvii.) the immortality of the soul, and (chap. xxviii.) the Divinity of Christ. Accordingly, this book had scarcely appeared when it was condemned by the Faculty of Theology, which procured a decree of the Parliament of Paris, dated 1st March 1552, suspending the sale, and summoning the printer to appear before it. Paul Lacroix, indeed, argues with probability that the first edition was suppressed, that which we have being the second, and the Epistle dedicatory to the Car-

dinal de Chastillon really thanking him for having, in conjunction with other friends, procured the royal permission for the republication of the work. At any rate, the king did intervene; and the Faculty of Theology and the Parliament left Rabelais and his book to their own wicked devices, unchecked. He was only made to resign one of the two livings he held; and in January 1553, he resigned that of St. Christophe de Jambet, being the farther from Paris. It is doubtful whether he had ever visited it. The vogue of this fourth book was such that the Paris printer almost immediately issued a new edition, revised and corrected by the author; and piratical editions abounded throughout France.

Our worthy *curé* of Meudon lived in his parish in peace, troubled only by a quarrel with Ronsard, who had taken up the cause of his friend and master, Pierre Ramus, the anti-Aristotelian, with whom Rabelais had a literary feud. Ronsard vented his rancour in a long epitaph on his old friend. Rabelais was a frequent guest of his "good parishioners" the Duke and Duchess of Guise, and was visited by the most distinguished scholars and nobles of Paris. He had grown so virtuously discreet, now that he was verging on the threescore and ten, that he would allow no woman to enter his manse! He assiduously fulfilled the duties of his office—improving his church, instructing his choristers, and teaching the poor to read. People flocked from all the surrounding country to see him in the character of a decorous *curé*, and hear him preach. Meudon thus became a regular resort of the Parisians, who continued to go there long after his death, in accordance with the proverbial saying,

still popular in the seventeenth century, "Let us go to Meudon; there we shall see the castle, the terrace, the grottos, and *M. le curé*, the man in all the world of the most agreeable countenance, the most pleasant humour, the best to welcome his friends and all honest folk, and the best of talkers." The date and place of decease and the place of burial are uncertain. It is rather tradition than history that he died at Paris, April 9, 1553, in a house in the Rue des Jardins, and was interred in the cemetery of the parish of St. Paul, at the foot of a large tree, which stood for more than a century. The accounts of his last moments are most contradictory: his friends reported that his end was what is called edifying; his foes that he proved by his conduct and mockeries in the face of death that he had no belief in another life. For my own part, I confess that I do not think Rabelais a likely subject for repentance. He who had always mocked life might well mock death. The chief stories concerning his end are well known. The first is given among the "Apophthegms" of Lord Bacon, who terms Rabelais the grand jester of France. When he had received Extreme Unction he declared that they had greased his boots for the long journey. When the attending priest asked him whether he believed in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the wafer given him for the Communion, he answered, with a respectful air: "I believe in it, and it rejoices me; for I seem to see my God as when He entered Jerusalem, triumphant and borne by an ass." When he was near the point of death they passed over him his Benedictine robe, and he still had the spirit to pun in allusion to it: "*Beati qui moriuntur in*

*Domino.*" ("Blessed are they who die in the *Lord*, or in a *domino*." ) He is said to have dictated the magnificent and munificent will : "I have nothing, I owe much ; the rest I give to the poor." Whatever doubt there may be as to the genuineness of the preceding, I think there can be little or none as to that of the two following ; they are so eminently characteristic. A page was introduced, sent by his friend Cardinal du Bellay, or Cardinal de Chastillon, to inquire as to his state. He beckoned the youth to his bedside, and murmured faintly : "Tell monseigneur in what gallant humour you find me ; I go to seek a great Perhaps." Finally, before expiring, he gathered all his strength to exclaim, with a laugh : "Draw the curtain : the farce is over." What adds to the presumption of the essential truth of these stories is the fact that the priest who confessed him and administered to him the sacrament spread the report that he died drunk, proving the priestly disgust at his end ; while we may assume that the absolution and sacrament would have been withheld had the same priest at the time not considered him to be in a fit state to receive them. All the poets of the time made epitaphs on him in French or Latin verse, most of them celebrating less his marvellous genius than his inexhaustible jollity. Thus his friend Baïf, one of the Pleiad, writes : "Oh Pluto, receive Rabelais, that thou, who art the king of those who never laugh, mayst henceforth have a laugher !" —

"O ! Pluton, Rabelais reçois,  
Afin que toi qui es le roi  
De ceux qui ne rient jamais,  
Tu aies un rieur désormais !"



Ronsard, as I have said, was rancorous, and in his epitaph represents him as simply a glutton and a drunkard, as if mere drinking and guzzling could have gathered together his immensity of manifold learning, could have written "Pantagruel," could have secured the friendship of such men as the Du Bellay brothers.

Eleven years after his death, in 1564, the year of Shakespeare's birth, was published, neither printer's name nor place being given, "The Fifth and last Book of the Heroic Deeds and Words of the Good Pantagruel." He is reported to have left other works in manuscript which never got printed. Although the Council of Trent had prohibited the whole work, and it had been placed upon the *Index Expurgatorius*, no practical measures seem to have been taken to stop its circulation, and its popularity was prodigious. This fifth book was in some respects the most daring of any, particularly in its intensely contemptuous attacks on the great Pope-hawk with all his host of cardinal-hawks, bishop-hawks, priest-hawks; and also upon the Furred Law-Cats of all kinds. Yet the Faculty of Theology did not censure it, nor the Parliament of Paris arrest its sale. This book conducts Pantagruel and his companions to the great Oracle of the Holy Bottle, whence they receive the ultimate word of all wisdom, the luminous condensation of the whole Pantagruelian philosophy, in the sublime word DRINK.

## IV

“Then I went in-doors, brought out a loaf,  
 Half a cheese, and a bottle of Chablis;  
 Lay on the grass, and forgot the oaf,  
 Over a jolly chapter of Rabelais.”

—ROBERT BROWNING: *Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis*.

Having sketched the life of Rabelais, it remains for me to venture a few remarks on his genius and his great work. Lord Bacon called him the grand jester of France, and this view of his character was the common one amongst us, so far as I am aware, until Coleridge challenged it in a famous passage, brief enough for citation here: “Beyond a doubt, Rabelais was among the deepest as well as boldest thinkers of his age. His buffoonery was not merely Brutus’s rough stick, which contained a rod of gold: it was necessary as an amulet against the monks and legates. Never was there a more plausible, and seldom, I am persuaded, a less appropriate line, than the thousand times quoted—

‘Rabelais laughing in his easy-chair,’

of Mr. Pope. The caricature of his filth and zanyism show [*sic*] how fully he both knew and felt the danger in which he stood. I could write a treatise in praise of the moral elevation of Rabelais’ work, which would make the Church stare and the conventicle groan, and yet would be truth, and nothing but the truth. I class Rabelais with the great creative minds of the world—Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes, &c.” I may note, in passing, that “the thousand times quoted” line of Pope is quoted incorrectly (as verse usually

is when quoted from memory), and on the face of it is imperfect; the real line, as we have it in the "Dunciad," i. 22, in the apostrophe to Swift, runs thus:—

"Whether thou choose Cervantes' serious air,  
Or laugh and shake in Rabelais' easy-chair."

As if over-anxious to distinguish himself from the purblind vulgar, Coleridge not seldom appears resolved to see more in a writer than the writer actually contains, reading himself into the book, in the manner marked by Göthe (First Epistle in the Poems): "Yet each only reads himself out of the book, and if he is powerful he reads himself into the book;" but his authority as a most subtle critic is rightly so great that no one since has ventured to treat Rabelais as a mere jester and buffoon. Strangely enough, in the very beginning of the Prologue to the first book, which is nearly all simple nonsense and extravagance, Rabelais makes the same claim for himself which Coleridge makes for him: "Alcibiades, in that dialogue of Plato's which is entitled the 'Banquet,' setting forth the praises of his teacher, Socrates, beyond all question the prince of philosophers, said among other things that he resembled the *sileni*. *Sileni* of old were little boxes, such as we now see in the shops of apothecaries, painted on the outside with wanton toyish figures, as harpies, satyrs, bridled geese, horned hares, saddled ducks, flying goats, thiller harts, and other such pictures, caricatured at pleasure to excite people to laughter, as did Silenus himself, master of the god Bacchus; but within they conserved fine drugs, as balm, ambergris, amomon,

musk, civet, jewels, and other precious things." He goes on to say that his book, like these *sileni* and Socrates, conceals things of the utmost value within a rude and absurd exterior; and then gives another illustration: "But did you ever see a dog meeting with a marrow-bone? He is, as Plato says ('Republic,' Book ii.), the most philosophical beast in the world. If you have seen him, you have been able to note with what devotion he watches it, with what care he guards it, with what fervour he holds it, with what prudence he manages it, with what affection he breaks it, and with what diligence he sucks it. What moves him to do all this? What is the hope of his labour? At what good does he aim? Nothing but a little marrow. It is true that this little is more delicious than much of anything else, because marrow is a nourishment elaborated to perfection by nature, as Galen says (iii. *Facult. Nat. et xi., de Usu Partium*). After the example of this dog, it becomes you to be wise, to smell, feel, and esteem these goodly books of high conception, easy in the pursuit, difficult in the encounter. Then, by sedulous reading and frequent meditation, break the bone and suck the substantial marrow, that is to say, what I mean by these Pythagorical symbols, with assured hope to be made discreet and valiant by the said study; for in this you shall find quite another taste, and a more abstruse doctrine, which will reveal to you most high sacraments and horrific mysteries, as well in what concerns our religion as in matters of public state and the life economical." Yet, immediately after, he ridicules these serious pretensions: "Do you believe, on your conscience, that Homer, writing the 'Iliad'

and 'Odyssey,' thought of the allegories which have been squeezed out of him by Plutarch, Heraclides Ponticus, Eustathius, Cornatus, and which Politian filched again from them? If you believe it, with neither feet nor hands do you approach my opinion, which judges them to have been as little dreamed of by Homer as were by Ovid, in his 'Metamorphoses,' the Sacraments of the Church, which a wolfish friar, a true bacon-picker, has tried to prove, if, perchance, he could meet with others as foolish as himself, and (as the proverb says) a lid worthy of the saucepan."

Now, while agreeing with Coleridge that Rabelais was among the deepest, as well as boldest, thinkers of his time, and even considering him, so far as I can judge, quite the boldest and deepest of all; while further agreeing that he is to be classed with the great creative minds of the world—Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes, &c.; and, while yet further agreeing that his filth and zanyism show how fully he both knew and felt the danger in which he stood, I must still think Pope's line not only plausible but also appropriate. Profound thought and creative genius may wear a riant not less than a tragic face, or, in some instances, the one and the other in alternation; and there are even instances in which one-half the mask has been of Thalia and the other of Melpomene; for wisdom and genius are not necessarily, though they are more frequently, grave. Democritus the laughers seems to have been a philosopher yet more subtle than Heraclitus the weeper, and our foremost scientific men are reviving his theories after more than two millenniums; and Aristophanes, I suppose, had at least as much imaginative genius as

Euripides. Now, Rabelais is essentially a laughing philosopher, endowed with the inestimable boon of high animal spirits, ardent and quenchless, not varied by fits of deep and gloomy depression, as in so many cases; his wisdom is always steeped in drollery, his imagination revels in riotous burlesque. If he felt bitterness against any class and institution in the world, it was against monks and monkery; and well might he feel bitter against these after the fifteen years, closing with the *in pace*, immured among the ignorant and bigoted Franciscans of Fontenay-le-Comte. Yet compare even this bitterness, kept acrid by such memories of personal wrong, with the double-distilled gall and wormwood of Swift on subjects in which he had no personal interest, and you will see how sweet-natured was the illustrious Tourangean. Both see with a vision that cannot be muffled through all the hypocrisies and falsehoods, all the faults and follies of mankind; but the scorn of Rabelais rolls out in jolly laughter, while the scorn of Swift is a *sæva indignatio*—the one is vented in wine, the other in vitriol. Both are prodigal in dirt, having an immense and varied assortment always on hand, to be supplied at the shortest notice. But the dirt of Swift, in spite of all that has been said against it, is in most cases distinctly moral, being heaped on immorality and vileness in order to render them the more repulsive; and it can therefore be vindicated on the same grounds as the grossness and obscenity of the Hebrew prophets, for to high thought and intense moral earnestness nothing that will serve a purpose can be common or unclean. The dirt of Rabelais, on the other hand, when he does not intentionally

besmear himself with it in order to appear a buffoon when most audaciously sarcastic and heterodox, has nothing to do with morality or immorality, but is simply the dirt of a child, such as he has described in the infancy of Gargantua, in Book i., chap. xi. As Mr. Besant, in his "French Humourists," remarks, "The filth and dirt of Rabelais do not *take hold* of the mind—a little cold water washes all off." We find the same in Chaucer and other early writers, though not so abundantly as in Rabelais, who had to use much for mere disguise, like one crouching in a foul ditch in order to escape his enemies; and though offensive to us now, it is perfectly innocent compared with certain recent French and English novels, more read by fine ladies than by any other class, wherein the vilest obscenity, mingled with spurious sentimentalism and other sweet nastiness, is served up in choice language—a luscious and poisonous compound, as revolting to the really pure-minded as that hideous Thais of Dante (*Inferno*, xviii.) in that cesspool of Malebolge—

"quella sozza scapigliata fante,  
Che là si graffia con l' unghie merdose,  
Et or s' accoscia, et ora è in piede stante.  
Taida è la puttana."

We may be sure that the rude and rigorous Dante, even the ineffably tender and ardent Dante of the *Vita Nuova* and the imparadised Beatrice, would have painted just such a picture of some lovely and fascinating countess of, say, Dumas *filis*—an exquisite and delicate creature, redolent of the costliest perfumes, and redolent of the impurest passions in the purest French.

Coleridge says: "It is impossible to read Rabelais without an admiration mixed with wonder at the depth and extent of his learning, his multifarious knowledge and original observation, beyond what books could in that age have supplied him with;" and Mr. Besant remarks that he knew more than any other man of the time. This learning and general knowledge he pours forth with the most careless prodigality on every page, *à propos* of everything and nothing, so as to suggest that his stores are really inexhaustible. The book-learning and the command over many languages are astonishing enough, especially to one who, like myself, is no scholar; but yet more astonishing is the other knowledge of which Coleridge speaks, the knowledge books could not furnish, and in which perhaps only Shakespeare can parallel him: in our day Robert Browning comes nearest to this quasi-omniscience. Rabelais' long medical studies may account for much of his acquaintance with natural history, which is such as to recall the precepts of Gargantua in that magnanimous letter to his son (ii. 8): "Now, in matter of the knowledge of the works of nature, I would have thee to study that exactly; that so there be no sea, river, nor fountain of which thou dost not know the fishes; all the fowls of the air; all the several kinds of shrubs and trees, whether in forests or orchards; all the sorts of herbs and flowers that grow upon the ground; all the various metals hidden within the bowels of the earth; the precious stones of all the Orient and the South—let nothing of all these be unknown to thee." But how and when and where did he gather, how did he find room in his head to store up that prodigious



knowledge, always ready to his want, of what I must call things in general—local customs, traditions, proverbs, rhymes, unwritten dialects, costumes, various trades and professions, with their implements and modes of working and technical terms, and so forth, and so forth? Such instances as Rabelais and Shakespeare make us incline to Plato's theory that all knowledge is but reminiscence, that we have all got thoroughly acquainted with our world in previous existences, and are only ignorant in so far as our memories are asleep or inert; or they suggest that a few privileged minds are as mirrors, wherein, without any effort on their part, all objects that come before them spontaneously image themselves, and that these images remain for ever clear and well-ordered, still without any effort on the part of the mirroring mind. Speaking of Rabelais' knowledge of herbs, we cannot but deeply regret that, through no fault of his own, he had to die in ignorance of the noblest of all, the herb of herbs, which is tobacco. Had time and fortune but made him acquainted with it, we may be sure that tobacco, and not vile hemp, would have been recognised by him as the herb Pantagruelion; and the last four chapters of Book iii., which are now devoted to the glorification of this herb of the hangman, would have been devoted to a far more enthusiastic eulogy of tobacco. How he would have described and anatomised it, this learned physician and naturalist! How he would have dilated on its countless efficacies and virtues, and on its marvellous affinities with good wine, this supreme philosopher, this royal reveller! Alas! that our peerless Pantagruelist was cut off from the know-

ledge of our peerless Pantagruelion ! It is a case doleful and disastrous as when two who were meant to be lovers, two souls complemental to each other, are by some error or oversight of nature born in different ages !

His style is as multifarious, or rather omnifarious, as his knowledge. The beautiful, child-like Old French of the Romances was gone, the modern French was slowly forming and still in a half-chaotic state, every one doing with it that which was right in his own eyes. Rabelais' exuberance of mere words and phrases is overwhelming ; and he often pours them out one on top of another interminably, rioting in their exhaustless rush and flow. The vocabulary of his age is far too poor for him ; he presses into his service every *patois*, he invents the wildest quirks and the most extravagant compounds, he lays ancient and modern tongues under tribute, stamping their coins with French inflections. In this enormous wealth and prodigal volubility of language, he is again to be compared only to our Shakespeare. I remember reading somewhere of two Oxford or Cambridge professors discussing whether Shakespeare or Milton had the greater command of language, when one remarked conclusively : "Why, in half-an-hour Shakespeare would have slanged Milton into a ditch !" I take it that Rabelais would have slanged Racine into a ditch in about five minutes. Despite his own chartered libertinism, Rabelais had a strong respect for the purity of his native tongue, as we see (ii. 6) by Pantagruel's treatment of the Limosin scholar who Pindarised or Latinised the plain honest French. And whenever he would be serious and

not humoristic, he proves that he has a most noble natural style of his own, rich without excess, as in the epistle of Gargantua already cited, the description of the Temple of the Holy Bottle at the close of Book v., and that at the close of Book i. of Friar John's glorious abbey of Thelemè, where all was in direct contradiction to what obtains in the monasteries and nunneries of the Church, where brave men and beautiful women freely mingled, where marriage was honourable, where the only regulation was to have no regulation at all: "In their rule there was but this clause—'DO WHAT THOU WILT.'"

It may be here remarked that though his immense learning, his infinity of allusions to matters abstruse and obscure, and of recondite and lawless words, render him by far the most difficult of French authors to translate, he has been Englished more happily and thoroughly than almost any other of the French classics, who, indeed, with the notable exception of Montaigne by Cotton, have been usually treated scurvily by hacks, or else neglected altogether. The case of Rabelais is not so surprising as it at first appears. Of a common French writer there may be a thousand or ten thousand English who could give a commonplace version. Of an unique writer there will be only half-a-dozen qualified to attempt the translation; but these will be well qualified, having strong affinities for the original in humour and predilections. I do not say that the version of Sir Thomas Urquhart and Motteux is by any means perfect, but it gives a better notion of Rabelais than I should have thought, before seeing it, could have been given in our language. Bohn's edition, in two

vols., is enriched with an abundance of notes on words, things, and events, gathered from the best commentators, and constituting a real treasure-house of Rabelaisian information. The cheap and handy edition of L. Jacob, Bibliophile (Paul Lacroix), published by Charpentier, Paris, has the advantage of the Memoir—to which I have already acknowledged my indebtedness—and of glossarial and other notes at the bottom of each page, thus sparing the reader the great nuisance of continual reference to a glossary at the end of the work, a nuisance so great that most readers soon give up referring at all.

Mr. Besant, in his bright book, "The French Humourists," says: "It is not impossible that England will yet learn to appreciate more largely this glorious wit and satirist. There may be found some man who has the leisure, and to whom it would be a labour of love to edit for modern readers the life and voyages of Pantagruel. The necessary omissions could be made without very great difficulty, and the parts to be left out are not inwoven with the web of the whole." For myself, although I detest castrated editions, I have no objection to see such an experiment tried with Rabelais; but I doubt whether the general reader, who may be supposed not to care for him in his complete form, would care for him thus mutilated. Mr. Besant goes on: "Considering him as a moral teacher, we must remember what things he taught, and that *he was the first to teach them* in the vernacular. Many of his precepts are now commonplaces, texts for the copy-book; but they were not so then. In that time, when only a few had learning, and the old mediæval darkness was

still over the minds of men, we must remember what things perfectly new and previously unsuspected he poured into men's ears." And he proceeds to enumerate some of them; yet in concluding his essay he writes: "A great moral teacher. Yes. But it would have been better for France if his book, tied to a millstone, had been hurled into the sea. . . . He destroyed effectually, perhaps for centuries yet to come, earnestness in France. He found men craving for a better faith, believing that it was to be found, and left them doubting whether any system in the world could give it. Great and noble as are many of the passages in Rabelais, profoundly wise as he was, I do believe that no writer who ever lived has inflicted such lasting injury on his country." Now, assuredly Mr. Besant is no Philistine; yet I cannot but think that when writing the last passage he was labouring under an attack of Philistinism. Perhaps he was depressed with a bad cigar, or bilious with a bad glass of wine; perhaps his good manners were corrupted for the moment by evil communications with men from Gaza, Gath, or Ascalon. Moreover, he is clearly inconsistent. If Rabelais has inflicted such unequalled and lasting injury on his own country, how can Mr. Besant hope that he will yet be more largely appreciated, that is to say more extensively studied, here? Does he want earnestness effectually destroyed in England? Again, how can a great moral teacher, profoundly wise, inflict lasting injury on his country? How can it be better for said country that the book of such a teacher should be tied to a millstone and hurled into the sea? If this is how Mr. Besant would treat the books of great moral teachers, what a dreadfully

wicked man he must be! Finally, I challenge altogether this charge against the French of want of earnestness. It is a common, narrow-minded English cant, quite unworthy of an accomplished gentleman like Mr. Besant. The great French people are no more to be judged by a few third-rate Parisian *littérateurs* than the English by the popular lady novelists of the day. And if there is light life in Paris (as well as profoundly serious), how much of it is encouraged by foreigners, including the virtuous English and Americans—the two people who, as we are aware, have the monopoly of virtue on this terrestrial globe? Were Pascal and his friends not earnest? Was not Fénelon? In our own day, Victor Hugo, Michelet, Quinet? The mass of the people sober, frugal, industrious? The men of the Revolutions, leaders of liberty in Europe, with their burning faith in humanity and progress, equality and fraternity? The French can laugh and enjoy themselves more gaily and gracefully than we, without getting stolidly besotted; therefore they are frivolous! They have had many pleasant humorists, therefore they are not earnest! It might as well be argued from their jolly old songs and the glorious humour of Burns (whose laughter is rich and deep-chested as Rabelais') that the Scotch are without earnestness!

On the whole, while conscious that I have neither the knowledge nor the intellect required for judging so large a question, I am inclined to look up to Rabelais as the greatest genius in French literature. Perhaps the very finest work in that literature has been done by Pascal, but Pascal's finest work is a series of fragments; and while as profound, he is

narrow as an artesian well, in comparison with the oceanic amplitude and energy, as well as depth, of Rabelais. Of the humour I say nothing—it is proverbial ; a frank, jolly laughter, unrestrained, diluvian, immense, inextinguishable as the laughter of the gods. His enormous erudition and knowledge are mere toys for his playtime ; but throughout his whole work, or play, he gives you the sense of easiest power and mastery—at home in everything, rising with its theme as readily as it falls, never strained or fatigued, able to do what it likes, equal and more than equal to far more arduous things if it cared to undertake them ; in short, with an indefinite reserve of capacity in all directions : and this I take to be the impression which only a supreme and Titanic genius can produce.

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## SAINT-AMANT

### I

THIS most jolly and genial smoker, toper, rover, soldier, and poet, after deservedly enjoying great celebrity during his lifetime, was almost forgotten, even in France, until Philarète Chasles called attention to him by a brilliant article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1839, under the title, "The Victims of Boileau : I. The Guzzlers (Goinfres). Marc-Antoine de Gérard de Saint-Amant." This was followed, in 1844, by Théophile Gautier's sympathetic and picturesque sketch in *Les Grotesques*, a series of ten portraits of half or wholly forgotten French humorous and humoristic poets, from Villon to Scarron, including Théophile Viau and Cyrano de Bergerac, also men of real genius. Finally, in 1855, C. L. Livet edited, with a careful prefatory memoir, a complete edition of his works, including many pieces never before published, in two vols., in the *Bibliothèque Elzévirienne* (P. Janet, Paris), so that all the world might again read what all the world had of old admired. In English the only notice of him that I have met occurs in that bright and pleasant book, "The French Humourists from the 12th to the 19th Century," by Walter Besant, author of "Studies in



Early French Poetry." The above have mainly furnished the materials for the following article.

Marc-Antoine de Gérard, Sieur de Saint-Amant, was born, in 1594, at Rouen, near the famous abbey of Saint-Amant, whence he took the name by which he is generally known, and died at Paris on the 29th December, 1661. The details for his biography are but scanty, and chiefly drawn from scattered statements and allusions in his own writings. His father was a distinguished naval officer, two-and-twenty years in the service of our Elizabeth, in which he attained the command of a squadron. At one period of his life he fell into the hands of the Turks, and was for three years a prisoner in the Black Tower at Constantinople. His two brothers perished fighting against the Turks—the one at the mouth of the Red Sea, the other, who had served under Gustavus Adolphus, at Candia, where he commanded a French regiment in the Venetian service. Two of his cousins-german also fell fighting the Turks, and one of his uncles had been in slavery amongst them. Thus our poet had plenty of family reasons for detesting those infidels; and his natural love and reverence for wine may have been intensified by the fact that it was forbidden by the Prophet. His education was considerably neglected, as his father could not attend to it, and his mother seems to have died when he was young. Thus he learnt neither Greek nor Latin; but, as he tells us himself, the familiar conversation of people in good society, and the diversity of wonderful things he saw in his travels, afterwards remedied the defects in his early training. He also mastered Spanish, Italian, and English; was an excellent musician and elocu-

tionist, reciting his own compositions so well that an epigram, attributed to Gombaud, remonstrates—

“Your verse is fine when you declaim,  
But, when I read it, very tame :  
You can’t continually recite ;  
So such as I can read, pray write.”

But we must not accept an epigram *au pied de la lettre*, as our neighbours say. We are told that three times in his youth he was nearly drowned in the Seine ; and he certainly had a holy horror of fresh water ever after. While yet quite young he became distinguished as a passionate lover of good eating, and yet more of good drinking ; and his society was much sought after by the jolly nobles of Louis XIII., not yet cowed by the stern discipline of Richelieu. Although he was very free in his speech, he never abused their familiarity, and they held him in singular esteem. He was soon attached to the household of one of the greatest of these, the Duke de Retz, with whom he retired to the domain of Belle-Isle, which the duke’s father, backed by his relative, Catherine de Medici, with whom he had come from Florence, had forced the monks to sell to him at a low price. Here Saint-Amant lived truly in clover, as, indeed, he managed, without any management or forethought, to live nearly all his life. M. Livet cites a letter, to which I shall have to refer again when I come to speak of the poems, from a M. Roger, Commissary of the Navy at Belle-Isle, to Desforges-Maillard. The writer had in his family old relatives, to whom one of his ancestors, seneschal of the isle, had communicated the following details : “The poet lived at Belle-Isle several years. He there composed a great part of his

works, and especially his 'Solitude,' which is the best of all. His sonnet which commences, *Assis sur un fagot, une pipe à la main* ('Seated upon a faggot, pipe in hand'), was written in a wine shop (*cabaret*), in the borough of Sauzon, in Belle-Isle, kept by a man named La Plante, whose posterity still exist. Saint-Amant was a debauchee. Nature alone had made him a poet; wine gave him enthusiasm. Often the marshal of Belle-Isle and he mounted to an old buttery-hatch (*crédence*), where they had a table loaded with bottles of wine. There, each on his chair, they made sittings of four-and-twenty hours. The Duke de Retz came to see them from time to time in this attitude. Sometimes the table, the pots, the glasses, the chairs, the toppers all rolled down together from the top to the bottom." So that these truly Gargantuan orgies of full twenty-four hours at a time are not so fabulous as Mr. Besant seems to imply, and not the Marquis but the marshal of Belle-Isle was the boon companion of our poet.

Sometime after 1620 he returned to Paris, where he charmed again with his high spirits, his lute, and his poems, all the prodigal friends whom he names so tenderly in his various pieces: the Baron de St. Brice, Chassaingrimont, Maricourt, Butte, La Motte, Chateaupers, Marigny-Mallenoë. It was a wild time, when men revelled and made love and fought duels at a rate which may well make our puny and decorous generations incredulous with astonishment. It was a riot of social lawlessness, soon to be scared and repressed by Richelieu, and then to be chained and gagged, stark and dumb, by the morose despotism of Louis XIV., which, in its turn, prepared the way for

the Great Revolution. For the quick French ever vibrate between the extremes of anarchy and tyranny : the golden mean, loved of our duller wits, is mean indeed in their logic. The *cabaret* in those days, like the coffee-house with us in Queen Anne's time, and like no place now that I know of in either France or England, was the really social resort of wit and genius, rank and fashion. There Racan long lodged while young and poor ; there the severe Boileau got helplessly drunk in preaching sobriety to the incorrigible Chapelle ; there Linière lampooned this same Boileau, while spending rapidly the money Boileau had just lent him ; there Mezeray composed all his writings ; there the pious Racine, even in 1666, went two or three times a day ; there Perron, before he was a cardinal, quarrelled with a stranger, whom he stabbed ; and there, above all, our Saint-Amant was king and high-priest, Abbot of Unreason, Lord of Misrule, rotund, rubicund, and Rabelaisian. Men vaunted him as their Master of the Revels, and boasted of drinking with him. Thus Vion Dalibray, the bitter epigrammatist, cries—

“Thou who, like Bacchus, hast drunk through all the world,  
Teach me, Saint-Amant.”

And again—

“I will make myself famous, at least in the *cabaret* ;  
They shall speak of me as they speak of Faret.  
What matters it, friend, whence our glory may swell ?  
I can acquire it with trouble scant,  
For, thanks to my God, I already drink well,  
And I have been on the spree with Saint-Amant.”

“See him at the cabaret,” writes M. Livet, “draped in his careless security. It is there that he finds that

genius which Boileau accords him for works of debauch and extravagant satire. Considering, in effect, the time and the place in which the 'Cabarets' and the 'Chamber of the Debauchee' were composed, these poems are the masterpieces of their kind. When he wrote them, like the drunken poet of Martial, or like Master Adam, on a wall, with a bit of charcoal, by fits and starts, amidst bursts of laughter, jests, and the clinking of glasses, the poet scarcely thought of Boileau, and still less of the advice which the satirist afterwards gave to authors—

'Add sometimes, and erase often.'

He wrote without pausing, never corrected, and took good care not to efface; and, when the inspiration was exhausted, you should have heard the wild remarks of his friends, no less voluble than himself! You should have seen their jovial grimaces! A fresh pitcher paid his efforts, a fresh pipe rekindled his ideas; and all at the same time, without listening to or hearing each other, read again, declaimed, criticised, varied whatever verses had tickled their joyous imaginations." Yes, our friend was always guzzling in the *cabaret*, excepting, be it understood, during the hours of Church service; for mine host caught harbouring guests during those hours would have been liable to be sent to the galleys. This cruel restriction had, however, the advantage of giving tipplers set times during which they could partially sober themselves at church, in saintly preparation for another bout at the tavern.

In 1631, Saint-Amant made a journey to England, where all that I learn of him is that he celebrated the

loves of their majesties Charles I. and Henrietta Maria, "in a very indiscreet style," and that he was faithful to his own love, the bottle.

In 1633 he went to Rome with the fleet of the Marquis de Crequi. On the foundation of the French Academy he was made one of its first members. Pellisson, in his "History of the Academy," records that at the meeting on January 2, 1635, three of the members excused themselves from making the prescribed discourse, though very capable, viz., Serizay, Balzac, and Saint-Amant. Our hero, in lieu of a discourse, which would have been much too dry for his taste, promised to gather for the famous Dictionary all the burlesque or grotesque locutions in the language; and surely no one living was master of a richer store of them than he. But it does not appear whether he fulfilled his promise. It is not likely that he cared much for the Academy, that arena of the *gladiateurs du bien dire*, to whose society he infinitely preferred that of—

"les honnêtes yvrognes  
Aux cœurs sans fard, aux nobles trognes,  
Tours les goziers voluptueux,  
Tous les debauchez vertueux,  
Qui parmi leurs propos de table,  
Joignent l'utile au delectable."

In 1637 he accompanied Henri de Lorraine, Comte d'Harcourt, who was appointed to command the fleet against Spain. This nobleman, surnamed *Cadet la perle*, because he was of the younger branch of the great house of Lorraine-Elbeuf, and wore a pearl in his ear, was born in 1601, and died in 1666. He distinguished himself very early as a valiant and

skilful soldier, and then in peace as a wild young rake and desperate duellist. His excesses were so outrageous and notorious, that when Richelieu sent for him and said, "M. le Comte, the king wills that you leave the country," he considered himself banished, and replied: "I am ready to obey." The great Cardinal, however, continued, "But it is to command the naval expedition." So was virtue rewarded; and, strange to say, the choice was fully justified by events. As our poet was much with him after this time, a short summary of his career may be given. With the Mediterranean fleet he captured Oristani, in Sardinia, and the isles of St. Honorat and Marguerite. In 1639 he took command of the French army in Piedmont; and with 8000 men attacked and defeated 20,000 Spaniards. After this battle it is recorded that the Marquis de Leganez, the Spanish commander, sent the message to D'Harcourt: "If I were the King of France, I would have you beheaded for attacking with so inferior a force;" to which D'Harcourt responded: "And if I were the King of Spain, I would have you beheaded for getting beaten with a force so superior." Then came the remarkable leaguer of Turin: French in the citadel being besieged by Prince Thomas of Savoy, himself besieged by d'Harcourt, himself invested by Leganez. D'Harcourt managed to take the city in three months. In 1643 he went as ambassador to England, and made a vain attempt to reconcile the Parliament and the king. In 1645 he commanded in Catalonia, conquering at Llorenz, but repulsed from Lerida. Sent to Flanders in 1649, he defeated the Spaniards near Valenciennes, and captured the town of Condé. In

the troubles of the Fronde he took the part of Anne of Austria, conducted the young king Louis XIV. into Normandy, and maintained his authority there, in despite of the Duchess de Longueville. He forced the Prince de Condé to raise the siege of Cognac in 1651, and kept Guienne quiet. Then he threw up his command, finding his services ill rewarded, and stung by the epigram of Condé, thus translated by Mr. Besant—

“That soldier fat and short,  
Renowned in story,  
The noble Count d’Harcourt,  
Brimful of glory,  
Who raised Cazal and took Turin,  
Is bailiff now to Mazarin.”

At the head of foreign troops he invaded Alsace and took several towns, but had to retire, beaten by the Duke de la Ferté. He then made his peace with the court, and was appointed Governor of Anjou. He died of apoplexy, in the abbey of Royaumont. He was generous and great-hearted as he was brave.

When our poet went with him, in 1637, his secretary was Faret. (Why does Mr. Besant throughout write him *Furet*? Always in the French I find him Faret, rhyming as inevitably to *cabaret* as *la gloire* to *la victoire*, love to dove, or quaffed to laughed.) Duty apart, the three were inseparable, and etiquette was banished. Among themselves, the Comte d’Harcourt was the *Round*, Saint-Amant the *Fat*, and Faret the *Old*. Nor was this familiar intimacy a secret to any one. The poet, in his preface to the piece in which he describes the Passage of Gibraltar, tells us that he composed it “beneath the stars which looked on



us drinking, with the glass, not the pen, in hand.  
And in the piece itself he sings of Harcourt—

“Already aloft on the poop,  
To pledge me he takes his cup,  
Where sparkles and laughs the nectar ;  
And crying *Masse!* to the troop,  
His voice alarms Gibraltar.”

*Masse!* being the summons to drink all together. In 1638 Saint-Amant returned to Paris for a time, and while there addressed to the Chancellor Seguier a petition for the privilege of conducting a glass-factory. This was readily granted ; and in his poem on Cider he has vaunted the miracles accomplished under his direction in this new enterprise. It should be remarked that this employment, and even the working in the factory, was not considered derogatory to a gentleman ; the injurious and often dangerous nature of the work, as well as the beauty of the product, being held to lift it from among menial labours. At this time Adam Billault, jolly Master Adam, who, according to Baillet, does more credit to carpenters than to poets, visiting Paris, would first of all be presented to Saint-Amant. The next year he rejoined d'Harcourt, then in Piedmont ; and he seems to have taken a gallant part in all the fighting, wielding pen and sword and glass with equal vigour and address. Early in 1643 he was again in Rome, where he composed *La Rome Ridicule*, a work which has been often imitated. It appeared at Paris the same year, without name of either author or printer, who were prudent in not revealing themselves, for the publisher was imprisoned, and ran some danger of being put to

death. The publisher of the *Custode de la Reine*, a satire of that time, was hanged, and the printer would have been hanged too, if caught. It is a pity that, in what are pleasantly termed civilised nations, poor poets can no longer hope to see such extreme justice done to those concerned in bringing out their works !

## II -

In this same year of 1643, our poet went with the Comte d'Harcourt to England, on the mission already mentioned. Looking up to Charles I. with the unperturbed reverence of those who had not yet thought of doubting the perfection of kings, and, as a Frenchman, devotedly loyal to Henrietta Maria, he had not only no sympathy with the Parliamentarians, he had not even comprehension of the sanity of the thoughts working in those "malign Roundheads," as he very roundly terms them. Cromwell was not then full to the front, and so escaped his wrath ; but it is delicious for us in these times to read his *Epigramme En-diablée sur Fairfax*, his Bedevilled or Devilish (how translate ?) Epigram, on that really conscientious and able, if not great, leader. Can you try to imagine why, in 1643, this good Lord Fairfax was still left on earth ? You might guess many times before you guessed the real reason—that is to say, the reason of our good friend Saint-Amant. This reason is that the devil, his Satanic Majesty, who, of course, has a fellow-feeling for other kings, and especially for kings in bad estate, fears that the said Fairfax, by some attempt at assassination (*attentat*), or by some

oblique means, would, *at least*, revolutionise hell or make it a republic. Wherefore our friend can conclude convincingly: "You see now what has made the devil hesitate, even to this hour, to carry him off." This historical judgment of a really bright intelligence on contemporary matters which he had unusually good opportunities of judging, gives us some idea of the value of judgments contemporary and posterior of intelligences usually anything but bright; the which judgments, elaborated in schools which know nothing at all practically of the subjects in question, are imposed upon us, the unread, and generally accepted by us, as that sublime thing, "the verdict of history." But Saint-Amant had personal reasons for discontent with England as he found it, and as it found him. He tells us, in a stanza really admirable for rhythmic power and energy: "I lose all in England—hair, clothes, and liberty; I lose here my time and my health, which is worth all the gold of the 'earth; I lose here my heart, stolen by a beautiful eye, beyond hope of recovery; and I believe, God not aiding, that at last I shall lose here all my wits." These are broad general charges, but he has emphasised one of them in another poem. Having on a certain occasion drunk freely, with the noble trust in Providence of a Hafiz or a Burns, he was overcome with sleep, and while he slept some miscreant robbed him. He lifts up his voice:—

"Gods, who look on while they rob me asleep,  
In which of you now can men have any faith,  
Now that Bacchus has betrayed Saint-Amant?"

What a nobly pathetic indignation! Bacchus has

betrayed Saint-Amant! The god has rendered his most ardent worshipper into the hands of his foes! It is ineffably humiliating, not so much even for the god as for the mortal with his firm faith in the god. M. Ch. Livet ejaculates, *Horresco referens!* as for myself, I can only avow that in my humble opinion the *Et tu Brute* of Cæsar is scarcely so magnanimous and touching. To end this tragic episode, it may be added that he promptly summed up his experiences of our nation in a poem entitled, "Albion : heroic-comic caprice." Either because this was too virulent, even for that time, or because France was growing rightly afraid of an England waging war against its king, the publication was not hazarded. That it was written *con amore*, which in this case means *con odio*, the conclusion sufficiently attests. With the date 12th February, 1644, we read the grandiose epigraph, *C'est fait*, "It is done;" as if he would say, with the most savage energy, "I have finished and annihilated this infamous England, in which they not only rebel against their anointed sovereign, but also sacrilegiously rob Saint-Amant when he is divinely drunk."

In 1645 we find him again at Paris, Montreuil having succeeded d'Harcourt as ambassador to England. This brings us to his connection with the famous Marie de Gonzague, daughter of the Duke of Mantua, who became so singularly the wife of two successive kings of Poland, these being brothers. It is not here the place to recount her life; but it may be remarked that she was beautiful, witty, and adventurous, and was more or less involved in the conspiracy against Richelieu headed by her lover, Cinq-Mars. In 1645

she accepted the hand of Ladislas Sigismund, King of Poland, who died shortly afterwards. His brother, the ex-Jesuit and Cardinal Casimir, succeeded to the throne, and in 1649 married this queen-dowager, his sister-in-law. The Abbé de Villeloin, Sieur de Marolles, who then enjoyed an immense reputation, was in high favour with the new queen, and exercised great influence over her, having been her tutor. Another great favourite was her secretary, M. des Noyers. Both of these were warm friends of Saint-Amant, and exerted themselves so efficiently in his service that we read, in the "Memoirs of Marolles," under the date of 1645: "The Queen of Poland, in consideration of my constant praise of the poems of Saint-Amant and because she had listened to some of his serious pieces with much pleasure, appointed him one of the gentlemen of her household, with a pension of three thousand *livres*, which she assured to him by warrant, and which she caused to be sent to him expressly." Saint-Amant, according to his wont, paid abundantly in verse the debt of gratitude he owed to all three. In a sonnet to the Queen he celebrates the love she has inspired in "the greatest king of the pole," but naturally says nothing of the nocturnal visits paid her before by Cinq-Mars, or of those letters she had written to him, whose discovery brought her into serious danger after his death. To Des Noyers he wrote a miscellaneous epistle (*Epître diversifiée*) from Coillure, the port of Roussillon, where he was staying with his dear friend, the Governor Tilly. He is constantly staying with dear friends, the best fellows, and jolliest souls on earth, all delighted to secure the boon-companionship of such

a cordial joy-inspirer. Having duly thanked Des Noyers for his good offices, he proceeds to recount his various enjoyments, a theme of which he never tires. He was not the man to be ashamed of his pleasures, or to demurely conceal them ; on the contrary, he riots in their celebration as heartily as he rioted in the pleasures themselves. Then comes an abrupt transition. He remarks—

“ Whatever’s the custom in any nation  
Is always sure of approbation.”

And to prove this he shows the real and manifold absurdity of the fashion then prevailing in France. The elaborate description of costume is a masterpiece of graphic satire, full of the most piquant details.

Having commenced his “Moses Saved,” which he terms the *Idyll heroic*, he set out for Warsaw to show it to the Queen of Poland, to whom it was to be dedicated ; but, as he tells the Queen in the letter of dedication, he was arrested at St. Omer. “Doubtless, had I not said at once that I had the honour to be one of your gentlemen of the chamber, and had I not been shielded by such beautiful and powerful arms, I should not have been able to parry the stroke of misfortune. I ran risk of my life, and the ‘Moses Saved’ would have been Moses lost.” He goes on to tell how he tried to refashion and complete the work *en voyage* : “But I found that the muses of the Seine are so delicate that they could not accompany me in this long journey ; that the fatigues of travel affrighted them, and that absolutely I must retire to some solitary retreat in the country where these

fair virgins dwell, in order to carry out my projected work." Accordingly he returned to Paris, where we find him during the first troubles of the Fronde. As the loyal friend and follower of D'Harcourt, he made a satiric *chanson* on Condé. This great man, though equal, as we have seen, to an epigram on D'Harcourt, did not feel equal to a combat in satire with a professional like Saint-Amant, or else thought such a combat beneath his dignity. He therefore took the dignified course of having our brave poet cudgelled on the Pont Neuf by some of his retainers, a noble example which may have been in the mind of Buckingham in his similar quarrel with glorious John Dryden. This indignity may have disgusted Saint-Amant for a while with the region where dwell those fair virgins, the muses of the Seine; at any rate he soon afterwards, in 1649, set out again for Poland, and this time got there; and remained, well and honourably treated, for two years. It is even recorded that he was not only gentleman of the chamber, but also Councillor of State. In some fine verses, semi-serious and grandiose, written in anticipation of this visit, he says that he has it in his mind to turn Pole; to clothe himself as a noble and proud Sarmatian; to adopt Polish fashions, even in their banquets, where they drink so much; to learn the language, and polish it, and translate his poems into it, in a style lofty, magnificent, and various; to become, in fine, the fat Saint-Amantsky instead of the fat Saint-Amant. However, he returned to France in 1651, calling at Stockholm on the way, being sent there by his royal patroness to represent her at the coronation of Christina, the

Queen of Sweden. He gained great favour with this most eccentric daughter of Gustavus Adolphus ; and, when she visited Paris in 1656, and the members of the French Academy were presented to her, she recognised him with particular pleasure.

In 1653 or 1654 his "Moses Saved" appeared under the title of "The Heroic Idyll," a title which naturally excited much criticism ; although, as he tells us, it was approved by the Academy.

Little is known of his life after this period. Many of his old friends and patrons were dead ; the manners of the court were altogether different, and the style of literature in vogue was also materially changing. Molière, Corneille, Racine, Boileau were shaping the grand classical literature of France, the literature of severe taste and rigid order ; the wild caprice and license of Saint-Amant and his friends would no longer be tolerated. Philarète Chasles compares him in this, his decay, to Falstaff grown old, after Prince Hal had become Henry V. Boileau, with his narrow, arrogant, stark common-sense ; Boileau, who had not a glimmer of poetry or geniality in his composition, was the cold-blooded executioner of these riotous, rich-blooded rakes of Parnassus, these revellers whose Hippocrene ran red with wine, and who took such scandalous liberties with the chaste muses. The best of them, such as our Saint-Amant, had abundance of energy, wit, fancy—nay, imagination and genius, all abundantly lacking in the cold-blooded pedant and pedagogue Boileau. But they had not good taste—they were quite unregulated ; they indulged in the most fantastic conceits, and their glaring faults were pitilessly condemned. Such are our neighbours—wild



for liberty, insane for rigorous discipline, the freest of men enamoured of fetters. Boileau was not contented with judging the poems of Saint-Amant; he went beyond his jurisdiction to deal with the private life; and his judgment, which would have been signally mean, even if true, is most ignobly base, seeing that it is false. In his first *Satire*, dating about six years after Saint-Amant's death, he writes :—

“ Saint-Amant n'eut du ciel que sa veine en partage :  
L'habit qu'il eut sur lui fut son seul héritage ;  
Un lit et deux placets composaient tout son bien,  
Ou, pour en mieux parler, Saint-Amant n'avait rien.  
Mais, quoi ! las de traîner une vie importune,  
Il engagea ce rien pour chercher la fortune ;  
Et tout chargé de vers qu'il devait mettre au jour,  
Conduit d'un vain espoir il parut à la cour.”

Ask me not to try to translate. You remember Byron's very just characterisation of this species of verse (“ *Childe Harold*,” iv. 38) :—

“ And Boileau, whose rash envy could allow  
No strain which shamed his country's creaking lyre,  
That whetstone of the teeth—monotony in wire !”

This general accusation of indigence is sufficiently refuted by what I have already told of the fortunes of Saint-Amant : at the utmost it could only be applicable to the last years of his life. In the words of M. Livet : “ Perhaps it would have been becoming to respect, and not to mock the poverty, happily only imagined, of a poet who had redeemed by seven or eight years of serious piety the wild errors of his youth. . . . Meanwhile, with the revenue of the glass factory of which he had the privilege, with the pension he

received from the Queen of Poland, with the profits of his works, which were highly esteemed before Boileau's time, with the friendship of the Duc d'Arpajon, the various members of the family De Retz, and many other great lords, we find it hard to believe that he was in that deep indigence generally attributed to him by several satires."

We know that he re-issued his works in 1651, a pretty sure sign of their continued popularity. About 1656, following the fashion of the time, he undertook a "Map of the Land of Reason." In 1658 appeared *La Gènereuse*, a poem. It is said that the glass-works failed, but we know not when. It is also said that some years before his death the troubles in Poland stopped his pension from the queen. He left some fragments of a poem, "Joseph and his Brothers in Egypt." There is a story that "he founded his hopes of the future" on a poem in honour of the king. He had certainly once promised, in his most modest fashion, to write such a poem, comparing the exploits of the king to those of Samson, "wherein I will display as much strength of genius as he had vigour in his arms." Is not that in the truly great style! But the story in question relates that the poem in question was entitled, "The Speaking Moon" (*La Lune Parlante*); that it was written in honour of the birth of the Dauphin; that it complimented Louis XIV. on his swimming; that the king could not endure the reading of it; and that the author did not long survive this disgrace. Now the Dauphin was born 1st November 1661, and Saint-Amant died on the 29th December, so that the death certainly came soon after the birth. But, on the one

hand, is it credible that the most joyous of men, a veteran of sixty-seven, after all his various experiences of life, would be broken-hearted because one particular poem failed of success? and, on the other, is it credible that a man perishing in neglect and misery would have access to the king, and to such a king as Louis XIV. had become in 1661? This story is told by Brossette, and only one contemporary repeats the tale. The story of Brossette and the story of Boileau are to one another as the two cats of Kilkenny.

According to the *Chevræana*, he passed his last days in a humble hotel of the Rue de Seine. He led there a tranquil and penitent life, far from the agitations of earlier times, *endeavouring to redeem his old wicked poems by pious verses, which were unfortunately not so good as the others.* That last touch is exceedingly characteristic. In fact, Saint-Amant was never irreligious. Born a Huguenot, he became a Catholic; and one of his earliest poems, written in the Belle-Isle days—which is, perhaps, the finest of his serious pieces—"The Contemplator," was addressed to the Bishop of Nantes, Philippe Cospeau, a man of great talent and profound piety, who took extreme interest in the young poet and gave him much excellent advice. We are apt to sneer at the ease with which Continental Roman Catholics conciliate devout faith with immorality; yet I think I have heard of Calvinists and Methodists (not to speak of other sectarians amongst us) who managed to unite the loosest rascality in conduct with the strictest orthodoxy in doctrine. For there is a good deal of human nature in man (and certainly not less in woman), whether Catholic

or Protestant, Christian or heathen; and where all live in glass houses none should throw stones.

It is recorded that his landlord, who had long known and loved him, never spoke to him about the rent. And then we read: "The Thursday, 29th December 1661, day of St. Thomas of Canterbury, died in the house of M. Monglas, long his host, who had died eight days before, the Sieur Saint-Amant, aged 73 or 75 [probably 67], after an illness of two days. He received the sacraments, and died a little before noon. M. l'Abbé de Villeloin [Marolles] attended him in his last moments, and administered to him the last rites. He is buried at [incomplete]." That was not such a bad end! Only two days' illness; in the house of a dear friendly host, who had never asked for rent; an old friend at his bedside with the consolations of religion. Even blameless men may sigh, May our last end be like his! As Mr. Besant says, in his "French Humourists" (p. 25), after citing Rutebeuf, La Fontaine, Henry Mürger, Marot, Villon: "They are all alike. When the last hour comes, they send for the priest and patch up a hasty peace with the Church. Good, easy-going French Church! She receives all these sinners on the easiest terms, gives them the kiss of a mother who only laughs at the follies of her children, and promises them, before they go to bed, forgiveness and a whole holiday for the morrow."

## III

Philarete Chasles, preluding the series of essays of which that on our poet is the first, says: "The sacred battalion of the poets of caprice is about to defile before us, led by some great lords, accompanied by one or two female adventurers; it contains no more charming personage than the smoker, the snuff-taker, drinker, rake, vagabond, brave and vauntful personage, *the good fat Saint-Amant (le bon gros Saint-Amant)*—for he had the paunch of Falstaff, as he had his wit. Payen, Megrin, Butte, Gilot, Desgranges, Dufour, Chasteaupers, all illustrious for having tiddled with this great man, come after him, and are celebrated in his songs. The *viveurs* of good society, the Comte d'Harcourt, Retz-le-Bonhomme, De Gèvres, De Tilly, Du Maurier, De Nervèze, Puy-laurens, form the main body; then the adventurous princesses, Christina of Sweden and Marie de Gonzague, wandering stars whose rays illumine this troop of voluptuaries. It draws with it the Abbé de Marolles and the song-writer Faret, all the brothers in debauchery, chiefs or soldiers of the boisterous society which, from 1630 to 1650, alarmed and annoyed Louis XIV."

But, while Saint-Amant's rank as the first of good fellows is thus acknowledged and confirmed, what of his rank as a poet? M. Chasles thus commences the essay: "This was a poet, alas! and a poet lost for the future. He had genius (*de l'esprit*), a genius ardent and subtle: he versified with wonderful ability. The language of poetry was pliant and flexible under

his pen, as the fusible matter which twists and curls at the breath of the glass-blower: he knew much of men and things." And Théophile Gautier, a competent judge in this matter, if ever there was one, writes: "Saint-Amant is assuredly a very great and very original poet, worthy to be named among the best of whom France can boast. His rhyme is extremely rich, abundant, unexpected, and often beyond hope; his rhythm is manifold (*nombreux*), ably sustained, and varied; his style is very diversified, very picturesque, full of images, sometimes without taste, but always interesting and fresh." And again, in his sketch of Théophile de Viau: "He seems to me, Regnier dead and Corneille not yet arrived, the most remarkable poet of this period. . . . Saint-Amant is the only one, in my opinion, who can advantageously compare with him; but Saint-Amant also is a great poet, of a magnificent bad taste, and of a *verve* warm and luxuriant, who hides many jewels in his dung-heap; but he has not the elevation and the melancholy of Théophile, balancing these with a grotesque and a rushing energy with which Théophile was not endowed. The one writes the poetry of a fat man, the other the poetry of a lean man: such is the difference." After these testimonies I need say nothing myself as to Saint-Amant's real poetical merits, except that I would rather have ten pages of Saint-Amant than a hundred of Boileau; and would rather read a hundred pages of Saint-Amant than ten of Boileau at any time, save when desperately in want of sleep.

Let us glance at a few of the poems. The first, generally considered the best of the serious pieces, is said to date certainly anterior to 1624, and to have

probably been composed in a grotto (at Belle-Isle), which more than a century after was still called the grotto of Saint-Amant, and "to which he retired when he was sick with too much wine." Gautier says: "It is a very fine piece, and of the strangest novelty for the epoch in which it appeared. It contains in germ almost all the literary revolution which afterwards broke out. In it, nature is studied immediately, and not through the works of previous masters. You find nothing in the poets called classical of that time which has this freshness of colouring, this transparency of light, this vagrant and melancholy reverie, this calm and sweet style, which give so great a charm to the ode on 'Solitude.'" His friend Faret's eulogium must be cited for its ingenious quaintness, in the style of the time. He assures us that if all those who admired it had followed their first impulse after reading it, "Solitude" would have been destroyed by its own praise! Three lines have been specially and most justly admired; they are so beautiful that they must be given in the original:—

"J'escoute à demy transporté,  
Le bruit des aisles du Silence,  
Qui vole dans l'obscurité."

By-the-bye this poem was translated into Latin by Etienne Bachot, a famous doctor, who wrote also (is that other famous doctor, John Brown, of Edinburgh, aware of the fact?) *Horæ Subsecivæ*. I have already mentioned the "Contemplator," which, with M. Livet, I am inclined to regard as even more profound and tender than the "Solitude." In *Le Soleil Levant* ("The Sunrise") there is a charming

touch of fancy, not unworthy of young Heine himself, which shows what delicate chords vibrated in this stout reveller (the original is much daintier than my rather free version) :—

“The pretty butterfly comes then,  
Its tremulous pinions rise,  
And seeing the sun shines again,  
From flower to flower it flies,  
To tell the good news of the time—  
That day returns to bless our clime.

There in our gardens rich and bright,  
Where many a rare thing grows,  
It carries from the lily white  
A kiss unto the rose ;  
And seems, a messenger discreet,  
To tell her some love-message sweet.”

I need scarcely say that the lily is masculine and the rose feminine, in French. In *La Pluye* he sings—

“Falling on the foliage green,  
What a pleasant sound rain stirs !  
How should I charm every ear,  
If the sweetness whispering here  
Could be breathed into my verse !”

And surely he strikes some fine tones in *La Nuit* :—

“Peaceful and lonely night,  
Without or moon or stars,  
With thy most sombre veils  
Enshroud the day that jars ;  
Come quickly, goddess, grant this boon to me ;  
I love one dark like thee.

. . . . .



The winds no longer blow,  
 The rain has ceased to dash,  
 The thunder sleeps ; I hear  
 Only the fountain's plash,  
 And some delicious lutes, whose notes arise,  
 Languid with lovers' sighs."

In *La Jouyssance* he exclaims—

"But dare I hope, O wonder of the skies !  
 To be as surely in your soul  
 As I can see myself within your eyes?"

As a transition from his love of nature to his love of nature's best fruit, we have in *La Pluye*, from which I have already quoted :—

"The heavens are black from base to top,  
 And their influence benign  
 Pours so much water on the vine,  
 That we need never drink a drop."

In *La Debauche*, partly translated by Mr. Besant ("French Humourists," p. 186), he invokes Bacchus, among other charms—

"By this pipe from which I wave  
 All the incense thou dost crave."

And Mr. Besant also translates a good part of what he terms "the liveliest, brightest letter possible" to Faret, entitled *Les Cabarets*. The conclusion is worth giving as it stands in the original :—

"Et de l'air dont tu te gouvernes,  
 Les moindres escots des tavernes  
 Te plaisent plus cent mille fois  
 Que ne font les echos des bois.  
 ET A MOY AUSSI."

He loves these energetic conclusions. Thus, in *Le Fromage* (like the real Pantagruelist he is, he celebrates cheese, ham, sausage, and all excitants to thirst, with only less rapture than the wine that slakes it), he concludes :—

“O of Bacchus thou sweet lure !  
 Cheese, thou art a treasure sure !  
 So may but of thee to think  
 Spur me evermore to drink !  
 FILL LACKEYS !”

The “Orgye” is of befitting dithyrambic irregularity. As it is brief (I mean the poem, not the debauch), it may be given entire :—

“Bring wine ! bring wine ! the freshest, sparkling red !  
 Pour, waiter, pour, till to the brim it fills,  
 For I would drink a toast in mighty swills—  
 Here’s to the health of all alive and dead !

Pour me yet of this rich red wine,  
 For it alone makes my red blood run ;  
 It is my fire, my blood, and my sun.

Oh, but it’s sweet ! it ravishes my soul ;  
 No such pleasure in life as the bowl,  
 No such pleasure in life as to drink ;  
 Keep pace with me, my dear friend Faret,  
 Or you shall be, ere you can wink,  
 Stripped of the name that rhymes with cabaret !”

In *Le Enamouré* he cites touching proofs of his devotion to his mistress :—

“Since to good ham I prefer  
 The visage of a damsel fair,  
 . . . . .  
 I can smoke not as of yore,  
 And in wine exceed no more :

Now ten pints a day suffice ;  
 Even this, you lovely droll,  
 Who enslave me with your eyes,  
 Is to drink your health, my soul ! ”

But our poet was not always either tender or jolly ;  
 with him, also, at times, indignation made verses, as  
 witness this horrible “ Imprecation ” :—

“ If to Evreux I e'er go,  
 May I burn with fever slow !  
 May I turn into a dog !  
 May I turn into a frog !  
 Let me be cut off from wine,  
 Nor get trust when I would dine ;

. . . . .  
 May for ever civil brawls  
 Trouble those accursed walls ;  
 May the sweet sun, glad and bright,  
 Never bless it with its light ;  
 May it rain there swords and spears ;  
 May all ills which in old years  
 Bards have prophesied, all those  
 Horrors, outrages, and woes,  
 Poison, murder, streams of blood,  
 Pest and famine, fire and flood,  
 Be right soon accomplished there,  
 Filling it with black despair.

This is what just anger heated  
 Him to cry, at table seated,  
 Furiously excited thus  
 'Gainst that city infamous,  
 Him of all men most benign,  
 Who in these days drink good wine.

O good tipplers ! Dear Faret !  
 With just cause you scorn that lair  
 More than thirty churches there,  
 And not one poor cabaret.”

One shudders to think of the maledictions our friend would have launched had he found himself, not in a single city, but in a whole state subject to the Maine Law! The last lines pleasantly recall those of my honoured namesake, that most valiant and jolly Norwegian song-smith, as we find them in Laing's translation of that glorious series of sagas, "The Heimskringla":—

" A hundred miles through Eida wood,  
And the devil an alehouse, bad or good."

We now come to a matter of special interest to Nicotians. On Vol. i., p. 182, of M. Livet's edition, stand these two sonnets:—

" Assis sur un fagot, une pipe à la main,  
Tristement accoudé contre une cheminée,  
Les yeux fixes vers terre, et l'ame mutinée,  
Je songe aux cruautés de mon sort inhumain,  
L'espoir, qui me remet du jour au lendemain,  
Essaye a gagner temps sur ma peine obstinée,  
Et me venant promettre une autre destinée,  
Me fait monter plus haut qu'un empereur romain.  
Mais à peine cette herbe est-elle mise en cendre,  
Qu'en mon premier estat il me convient descendre.  
Et passer mes ennuis à redire souvent :  
Non, je ne trouve point beaucoup de difference  
De prendre du Tabac à vivre d'esperance,  
Car l'un n'est que fumée, et l'autre n'est que vent."

" Voicy le rendezvous des enfans sans soucy,  
Que pour me divertir quelquefois je frequente.  
Le maistre a bien raison de se nommer la Plante  
Car il gaigne son bien par une plante aussy.  
Vous y voyez Bilot pasle, morne et transy,  
Vomir par les nazeaux une vapeur errante ;  
Vous y voyez Sallard chatouiller la servante,  
Qui rit du bout du mez en portrait raccourcy,

Que ce borgne \* a bien plus Fortune pour amie  
 Qu'un de ces curieux qui, soufflant l'alchimie,  
 De sage devient fol, et de riche indigent !  
 Cestuy-la sent enfin sa vigueur consumée,  
 Et voit tout son argent se resoudre en fumée ;  
 Mais lui, de la fumée il tire de l'argent."

As will appear directly, I have no need to try my hand at the first. I give the following version of the second in default of a better :—

"Of careless souls this is the meeting-place,  
 Which sometimes I frequent for my delight,  
 The master calls himself La Plante with right,  
 For to a plant his fortune he can trace.  
 You see there Bilot pale as in sad case,  
 From both whose nostrils vapour takes its flight,  
 While Sallard tickles at the servant light,  
 Who laughs with nose up and foreshortened face.  
 How much this one-eyed better friends must be  
 With Fortune than those alchemists we see  
 From wise becoming mad, from rich quite poor !  
 They find at length their health and strength decay,  
 Their money all in smoke consumed away ;  
 But he from smoke gets money more and more."

Of a truth, it may be remarked, parenthetically, save in the fact that he was singular with respect to eyes, this La Plante was the very fore-ordained prototype of Cope, with his opulent Tobacco Plant of the two-fold leaves, literary and nicotian !

Now, in the *Tobacco Plant* for August 1874, under the heading, "Who wrote it ?" Mr. Besant's translation of the first of these sonnets is cited from the "French Humourists" (p. 184), together with a sonnet

\* La Plante was "*un cabaretier borgne qui tenait un cabaret borgne*," the one-eyed host of a low wine-shop, or, as we should say, pot-house.

on Tobacco by Sir Robert Aytoun, so closely resembling it that it was clear that either Sir Robert imitated Saint-Amant or Saint-Amant imitated Sir Robert; whence the question, Whose was the original? Sir Robert was born 1570, and died February 1638, as is recorded on his monument in Westminster Abbey. He studied civil law at the University of Paris, and was on the Continent from 1590 till 1603, when a Latin poem to King James brought him into favour with that monarch. He was an accomplished courtier, was private secretary to Queen Anne, and afterwards to Henrietta Maria, and received many a good gift from royalty. His English and Latin poems (he wrote others in Greek and French, but these have not been preserved) were privately printed in 1871, by the Rev. Charles Rogers, LL.D., Historiographer to the Historical Society, from the collation of two MSS., and the comparison with such of the pieces as appear in Watson's Collection. The sonnet on Tobacco is not in that collection. Aytoun's verses are smooth and graceful, and sometimes something more. Dryden said they were among the best of that age; Burns altered, without improving, his "For-saken Mistress" ("I do confess thou art sae fair"); the first "Old-Long-Syne" is attributed to him; and the "Invocation of his Mistress," which Dr. Rogers prints in his volume, has been ascribed to Raleigh. It is that containing the well-known stanza:—

"Silence in love bewrays more woe  
Than words, though ne'er so witty;  
A beggar that is dumb, you know,  
Doth merit double pity."

He was, therefore, quite capable of writing the sonnet

in question ; and, as Saint-Amant visited England in 1631, Sir Robert *might* then have shown him it in MS. But, on the other hand, Saint-Amant published his first volume of poems in 1627 or 1629 (I find both dates given, and have no means of deciding) ; and these two sonnets seem to have been included in it, both referring to his Belle-Isle period. Then there is the direct and specific evidence of the letter cited by M. Livet, which I have given in the first part. Again, we have the two sonnets together in Saint-Amant, while there is no other such piece in Sir Robert. Furthermore, we know that Saint-Amant was a great smoker, while it is not at all probable that Sir Robert, as a favourite of James, indulged in the weed. Lastly, I don't believe that Sir Robert ever sat on a faggot in his life, being far too courtly a gentleman ; whereas Saint-Amant may have done so countless times in one and the other *cabaret borgne*. Wherefore, although, as a leal Scot, I would fain claim the honour for my countryman of writing this, "one of the earliest sonnets extant in praise of tobacco," as Mr. Besant says, I am constrained to yield to Saint-Amant the credit of being the original.

And now to finish with our jolly friend. Mr. Besant says : "Though he is a dependant, he is never a parasite. A gentleman he is born, a gentleman he remains." This is quite true. Strange as it may seem, he was thoroughly independent in everything, and could be haughty if his self-respect were touched. As a poet, he says : "If I read the works of another, it is simply to guard myself from repeating his thoughts." One day, says Tallemant, dining at the table of the coadjutor (the celebrated De Retz,

afterwards cardinal), he could exclaim before an assemblage of valets: "I have fifty years of liberty on my head." "You have written pretty verses," said Esprit, his colleague at the Academy, to him, at the table of Chapelain. "Deuce take your pretty," he cried angrily, and could scarcely be persuaded to stay. On another occasion he shouted: "Shut the doors! let no one enter; no valets here! I have trouble enough to recite before their masters." He called himself the fat Virgil, and the Norman Democritus. I must not omit to mention one of the best jokes of his life: it is said that in his latter days he had hopes of an abbey, or even a bishopric. Surely he would have been a noble priest, after the order of Saint Rabelais; for of him, as of Chaucer's Monk, it could have safely been said:—

"Now certainly he was a fair prelat;  
He was not pale as a for-pynèd goost."

And as of Chaucer's Frere:—

"Ful sweetly herde he confessioun,  
And plesaunt was his absolucioun.  
He was an esy man to geve penance.  
.  
.  
.  
.  
.  
He knew wel the tavernes in every toun,  
And every ostiller or gay tapstere."



## BEN JONSON

### I

IT is now threescore years since Gifford brought out and dedicated to Canning his edition of the works of Ben Jonson, with the text carefully revised and annotated, and elaborate introductory Memoirs. These Memoirs made a new era in the posthumous history of Rare Ben, tearing to shreds and tatters all the slanders against him, whether woven of errors or of malignant inventions, which had been handed down from one careless writer to another, and particularly all the foul calumnies of his envying and traducing Shakespeare, which the commentators on the latter—Malone, Steevens, and the rest—had fabricated out of the flimsiest and most incongruous yarns of suspicion and prejudice. It was a work well suited to Gifford's mind and temper—keen, vigilant, honest, and somewhat acrid; and he is quite at his best in it, inspired with a generous passion to redeem a great and venerable name from unmerited obloquy. I don't know whether his version of Juvenal still survives; I fancy very few of this generation have read his "Baviad" and "Mæviad," which young Byron termed the first satires of the day, calling aloud, "Why slumbers Gifford?" and, "Arouse thee, Gifford!" but if his

name lives not by itself, it will at any rate go down to remote posterity honourably associated with that of Massinger, associated more honourably yet with that of Ben Jonson. So thoroughly, indeed, has he wrought his labour of love that, so far as I am aware, he has left nothing of any importance, as regards either the life or the text, to be done by those who come after him. About four years ago Hotten published a cheap and handy reprint (why undated?), in three volumes, of Gifford's edition, under the care of that excellent editor, the late Lieut.-Col. Francis Cunningham (son of Allan), who made a few slight corrections, added a very few notes, together with some short pieces discovered since Gifford's time; and included a copy of the complete transcript, also unknown to Gifford, of Drummond of Hawthornden's celebrated notes of Ben Jonson's conversations with him, which was found by Mr. David Laing in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh. This latest edition I use for the present article.

Benjamin, or (as he usually styled himself) Ben Jonson, was born about a month after his father's death, early in 1573, in the city of Westminster. He told Drummond that "his Grandfather came from Carlisle, and, he thought, from Annandale to it; he served King Henry VIII., and was a gentleman;" whence we may presume that he was one of the Johnstones who abound in Annandale. "His Father losed all his estate under Queen Marie, having been cast in prisson and forfaitted; at last turned minister: so he was a minister's son." His mother seems soon to have made a second marriage with a master bricklayer. Ben was first sent to a private school in the

church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, and afterwards, at the expense of the famous Camden, who was then the second master, to Westminster School. Camden's great work, the "Britannia," was published in 1586, during the time he was befriending Jonson, and passed through eight editions before 1590. Jonson was ever grateful for his generosity and instruction. "Every Man in his Humour" is dedicated to him; he is mentioned with honour in two of the "Masques," and to him No. 14 of the "Epigrams" is addressed, well worth citing for the sake of both:—

"CAMDEN! most reverend head, to whom I owe  
 All that I am in arts, all that I know;  
 (How nothing's that!) to whom my country owes  
 The great renown and name with which she goes!  
 Than thee the age sees not that thing more grave,  
 More high, more holy, that she more would crave.  
 What name, what skill, what faith hast thou in things!  
 What sight in searching the most antique springs!  
 What weight, and what authority in thy speech!  
 Men scarce can make that doubt, but thou canst teach.  
 Pardon free truth, and let thy modesty,  
 Which conquers all, be once o'ercome by thee.  
 Many of thine this better could than I;  
 But for their powers, accept my piety."

It is said that from Westminster he went to Cambridge, an exhibition having been procured for him; but there is no clear evidence on the point. If he did go, he did not matriculate, for he told Drummond that he was Master of Arts in both the Universities by their favour, not his study. When he returned home his stepfather took him into his own business, and many a mean sneer was afterwards flung at Ben for his bricklaying, by those of his contemporaries with whom he was at feud. He seems to have kept,

or been kept, to the trade only about a twelvemonth, for he could not endure it ; and, when eighteen, went off as a volunteer to the English army in Flanders. Though he served but one campaign, he was always proud of his soldiering. Drummond reports from his own lips : " In his service in the Low Countries, he had, in the face of both the camps, killed anemie and taken *opima spolia* from him." As Gifford remarks, in those days, when great battles were rarely fought, and armies lay for half a campaign in sight of each other, it was not unusual for champions to advance into the midst and challenge their adversaries ; and he thinks it probable that at that particular time such challenges were encouraged by Vere, the English general, who was undertaking the most daring enterprises, in order to animate the troops, dispirited by the tame surrender of a fort by Stanley. In his Epigram 108, " To True Soldiers," Ben writes loftily :—

" I swear by your true friend, my Muse, I love  
Your great profession, which I once did prove ;  
And did not shame it with my actions then,  
No more than I dare now do with my pen."

It is probable that Jonson returned to England because of his stepfather's death. He says that on his return he resumed his wonted studies. His story at this time is very obscure ; but he appears, like so many of his educated contemporaries, to have resorted to writing for the stage. It is said that he also tried acting and failed, but there is no evidence for this save Decker's " Satiromastix," which, as a rabid attack on Jonson, cannot be trusted in anything that concerns him. He had at least one qualification

for the stage, according to the Duchess of Newcastle, who says in her "Letters" (Charles Lamb's delight): \* "I never heard any man read well but my husband, and I have heard him say that he never heard any man read well but Ben Jonson, and yet he hath heard many in his time;" as well he might, his house for half-a-century being open to every man of genius or learning.

It was then the custom of managers to hire authors to write new pieces or re-write old, advancing them money on the credit of their talents, or in proportion to the progress of the work; and they encouraged young authors to write in conjunction with those already in possession of the stage. Jonson's earliest efforts were made in this manner, but it is not known in what dramas he took part. The first we are sure of, and this is by him alone, is "Every Man in his Humour," which was popular in 1596, having been acted eleven times between November of that year and May of the year following. It is remarkably mature for a writer but little over twenty. Before this was produced he had married, and must have been in considerable straits. Drummond reports: "He married a

\* "But what moved thee, wayward and spiteful K., to be so importunate to carry off with thee, in spite of tears and adjurations to thee to forbear, the Letters of that princely woman, the thrice noble Margaret Newcastle?—knowing at the time, and knowing that I knew also, thou most assuredly wouldst never turn over one leaf of the illustrious folio;—what but the mere spirit of contradiction, and childish love of getting the better of thy friend? Then, worst cut of all! to transport it with thee to the Gallican Land—

"Unworthy land to harbour such a sweetness,  
A virtue in which all ennobling thoughts dwell,  
Pure thoughts, kind thoughts, high thoughts, her sex's wonder."

—ELIA, *on The Two Races of Men.*

wyfe who was a shrew, yet honest [chaste]; five yeers he had not bedded with her, but remayned with my Lord Aulbanie." This was Esme, Lord Aubigny, afterwards Duke of Lenox, to whom "Sejanus" was dedicated, and Epigram 127 addressed, beginning—

"Is there a hope that man would thankful be,  
If I should fail in gratitude to thee,  
To whom I am so bound, loved AUBIGNY?"

By this marriage he had several children, of whom none is known to have survived him. There is a record, which may refer to him, of another marriage in 1623. In 1597 there are memorandums of advances by Henslowe and his son-in-law, Alleyn (the founder of Dulwich College), to Ben Jonson, on account of works in progress, which, however, are not specified: £4 twice, twenty shillings, and as low as five shillings. One of these notes calls him "player," so that there is some foundation for the story that he tried acting at first. The scene of "Every Man in his Humour" was at first laid in Italy, and as the manners were almost wholly English, there were of course many incongruities. Jonson was, therefore, well advised when he transferred the action to London, turned the Italian names into English, made all alterations necessary, and introduced circumstances appropriate to the new scene. According to the custom of the times, these numerous changes made the revised piece his own, although he had sold it in its first form right out, reserving no interest in it whatever; and in 1598 this revised piece was acted for the first time at the Black Friars Theatre (Henslowe and Alleyn had the Rose), and at the head of the list of the principal performers in it stands the name of Shakespeare,

whose first acquaintance with Ben Jonson is commonly assigned to this period. This fine comedy established the author's reputation, and placed him at once, though only twenty-five, among the foremost dramatists of the age. From this period, says Gifford, he perceptibly grew into acquaintance and familiarity with the wise and great; and from this period he was pursued by the envious detraction of some of the less fortunate playwrights with whom he had been accustomed to work, particularly Decker and Marston. Poor as he was when the first version was brought out (probably in 1595), the Prologue is remarkable for the high freedom of its strain, commencing—

“ Though need make many poets, and some such  
 As art and nature have not bettered much ;  
 Yet ours for want hath not so loved the stage,  
 As he dare serve the ill customs of the age,  
 Or purchase your delight at such a rate,  
 As, for it, he himself must justly hate.”

And near the end was a very lofty passage, not in the current version, but retained by Gifford in a note—

“ You see  
 How abjectly your poetry is ranked,  
 In general opinion. . . .  
 I can refell opinion, and approve  
 The state of poesy, such as it is,  
 Blessed, eternal, and most true divine :  
 Indeed, if you will look on poesy,  
 As she appears in many, poor and lame,  
 Patched up in remnants and old worn-out rags,  
 Half-starved for want of her peculiar food,  
 Sacred invention—then I must confirm  
 Both your conceit and censure of her merit :  
 But view her in her glorious ornaments,  
 Attired in the majesty of art,

Set high in spirit with the precious taste  
Of sweet philosophy ; and, which is most,  
Crowned with the rich traditions of a soul,  
That hates to have her dignity prophaned  
With any relish of an earthly thought,  
Oh ! then how proud a presence doth she bear !  
Then is she like herself, fit to be seen  
Of none but grave and consecrated eyes."

In the words of Gifford : "These lines, which were probably written before he had attained his twenty-second [twenty-third] year, do not discredit him ; and let it be added to his honour, that he invariably supported, through every period of his chequered life, the lofty character with which his youthful fancy had invested the Muse." It may be noticed also, with regard to the "sacred invention," poesy's "peculiar food," that he always insisted on this, calling "versers," not poets, such as had not manifested this high faculty, whatever their merits. Keats thought in like manner. When about the same age as Jonson he wrote thus : "Besides, a long poem is a test of Invention, which I take to be the polar-star of poetry, as Fancy is the sails, and Imagination the rudder. . . . This same Invention seems, indeed, of late years to have been forgotten as a poetical excellence."

This year, 1598, in which he made his first decisive step towards fame and fortune, had almost brought his career to an abrupt close. He informed Drummond that, "being appealed to the fields, he had killed his adversarie, which had hurt him in the arme, and whose sword was 10 inches longer than his ; for the which he was emprissoned, and almost at the gallows. Then took he his religion by trust, of a priest who visited him in prisson. Thereafter he was 12 yeares



a Papist. . . . In the tyme of his close imprisonment under Queen Elizabeth, his judges could get nothing of him to all their demands but I [Ay] and No. They placed two damn'd villains to catch advantage of him, with him, but he was advertized by his keeper: of the Spies he hath ane epigrame." Which is No. 59:—

"Spies, you are lights in state, but of base stuff,  
Who, when you've burnt yourselves down to the snuff,  
Stink, and are thrown away. End fair enough."

Gifford antedates these events about three years, while exposing "maggoty-pated" Aubrey, who writes: "He killed Mr. Marlowe, the poet, on Bunhill, coming from the Green Curtain playhouse [a low-class theatre in Shoreditch];" Marlowe, whom Jonson highly esteemed, witness his "Marlowe's mighty line," having been killed in a tavern brawl at Deptford, in May 1593: a tragical loss to English poetry, only surpassed by the drowning of Shelley at nearly the same age. Col. Cunningham, however, quotes from Collier's "Life of Alleyn," a letter of Henslowe, dated 26th September 1598: "Sence you weare with me I have lost one of my company which hurteth me greatly, that is Gabrell, for he is slayen in Hogesden fyldes by the hands of bergemen [bengemen, for Benjamin? Henslowe spelling the name thus elsewhere] Jonson, bricklayer." The "bricklayer" was probably added in bitterness of spirit for the loss of a friend and actor not easy to replace; perhaps, also, in spleen, because Jonson had taken the revised, "Every Man in his Humour," to another house. The spies, we may presume, were set upon him simply because of his communication with the priest.

Plots against the life of the Queen abounded, as did spies to counteract them ; several Romish priests educated abroad were convicted of attempting to poison her, and executed ; and new converts, such as Jonson then was, were among the most zealous and daring tools of the Jesuits. It is not known how long he was kept in prison on this occasion, nor how he procured his release. The facts that he was the challenged and not the challenging party, and that his adversary acted unfairly in using a sword so much the longer, must have weighed in his favour.

In 1599 his Comical Satire, "Every Man out of his Humour," was first acted at the Globe on the Bank Side, by the Lord Chamberlain's servants, who, being licensed by King James soon after his accession, took the title of His Majesty's Servants. All the principal members of the company, except Shakespeare, had parts in this piece. When published, in the following year, Jonson dedicated it to "The noblest Nurseries of Humanity and Liberty in the Kingdom, the Inns of Court," stating : "When I wrote this poem I had friendship with divers in your societies ; who, as they were great names in learning, so they were no less examples of living." In the introductory dialogue, which is substituted for the ordinary prologue, Jonson, under the name of Asper, is fiercely passionate in his denunciation of prevalent vices. Thus he exclaims—

" my soul

Was never ground into such oily colours,  
To flatter vice, and daub iniquity :  
But, with an armèd and resolvèd hand,  
I'll strip the ragged follies of the time  
Naked as at their birth."

And again :—

“ I fear no mood stamped in a private brow  
 When I am pleased t’ unmask a public vice.  
 I fear no strumpet’s drugs, nor ruffian’s stab,  
 Should I detect their hateful luxuries :  
 No broker’s, usurer’s, or lawyer’s gripe,  
 Were I disposed to say, they are all corrupt.  
 I fear no courtier’s frown should I applaud  
 The easy flexure of his supple hams.”

And, when he turns to the audience, he addresses them thus, courtly, yet careful to reserve his independence and self-esteem :—

“ Gracious and kind spectators, you are welcome ;  
 Apollo and the Muses feast your eyes  
 With graceful objects, and may our Minerva  
 Answer your hopes, unto their largest strain !  
 Yet here mistake me not, judicious friends ;  
 I do not this to beg your patience,  
 Or servilely to fawn on your applause,  
 Like some dry brain, despairing in his merit.  
 Let me be censured by the austerest brow,  
 Where I want art or judgment tax me freely :  
 Let envious censors, with their broadest eyes,  
 Look through and through me : I pursue no favour ;  
 Only vouchsafe me your attentions,  
 And I will give you music worth your ears.”

“ Every Man out of his Humour ” was well received. “ Queen Elizabeth, drawn by its fame, honoured the play with her presence ; and Jonson, to pay a respectful compliment to his sovereign, altered the conclusion of his play into an elegant panegyric. Mr. Collins, the poet,” Gifford cites from Davies, “ *Dram. Miscel.*,” “ first pointed out to me the peculiar beauties of this address.” This stands

now as the epilogue at the presentation before the Queen, who was one of the first encouragers of the youthful poet: "Three distinct notices of Jonson appear in Mr. Henslowe's memorandum-book for the year 1599. The sum of forty shillings was advanced to him and Decker, for a play which they were writing in conjunction; a like sum for another, in which Chettle was joined with them; and a third sum of twenty shillings for a tragedy ('The Scotts Tragedy') which he was probably writing alone. None of these are now extant, but 'Cynthia's Revels,' on which he was at this time employed, was brought out in the following year." When one reads of such small advances, even allowing for the greater value of money at that time, one understands why some of the dramatists were so exceedingly prolific; for a man could not have sustained life on slow, careful, play-writing, unless eked out by acting or a share in a theatre; and one agrees with Gifford that Jonson must have written much more than has come down to us with his name, and mended many plays, in order to support his family. It is true that he was assisted by patrons, such as the Lord Aubigny already mentioned, and the Earl of Pembroke, who, as he told Drummond, every first day of the new year sent him £20 to buy books; it is also true that Drummond reports: "Sundry tymes he hath devoured his bookes, *i.e.*, *sold them for necessity*." And also: "He dissuaded me from Poetrie, for that she had beggered him, when he might have been a rich lawer, physitian or marchant."

"Cynthia's Revels: a Comical Satire," was first privately acted by the children (all boys) of the Queen's

Chapel, a well-trained, well-established, and popular company, who shared the Blackfriars with the Lord Chamberlain's servants. It is a satire on the courtiers of the day, infected with the high-flown, fantastic, and pedantic affectations of euphuism made fashionable by John Lyly.

## II

In the first year of the seventeenth century we find "Bengemy" employed by Henslowe in writing additions to "Jeronymo," and Alleyn advancing him forty shillings on account of them. As Gifford remarks, had the records of any other theatres been preserved, we should probably have found the name of our poet among their supporters, for he must have produced much more at this time than has reached us. In this same year the "Poetaster" was brought out, also at the Blackfriars and by the children of the Queen's Chapel. In this play Marston and Decker were satirised, under the names of Crispinus and Demetrius. Jonson, in the "Apologetical Dialogue" affixed to the piece, thus vindicates and explains his purpose—

*"Polyposus.* Why, they say you taxed  
The law and lawyers, captains and the players,  
By their particular names.

*Author.* It is not so.  
I used no name. My books have still been taught  
To spare the persons and to speak the vices.

. . . . .  
Sure I am, three years  
They did provoke me with their petulant styles  
On every stage: and I at last, unwilling,  
But weary, I confess, of so much trouble,

Thought I would try if shame could win upon 'em ;  
And therefore chose Augustus Cæsar's times,  
When wit and art were at their height in Rome,  
To shew that Virgil, Horace, and the rest  
Of those great master-spirits, did not want  
Detractors then, or practicers against them."

As for the soldiers, he cleared himself with them by the "Address to True Soldiers," already quoted from ; but that much more ferocious class, the lawyers, gave him more trouble, and it needed the influence of a powerful friend among them (Mr. Richard Martin, Recorder of the City of London, to whom he gratefully dedicated the piece when published) to save him from prosecution. The general public was favourable to it. Decker retorted with "Satiromastix ; or, The Untrussing of the Humorous Poet," produced in the following year. He was a rapid and vigorous writer, with a vein of passionate poetry richer than any in Jonson's richer mine ; but this play is by no means a favourable specimen of his powers. As Gifford says : "Jonson played with his subject ; but Decker writes in downright passion, and foams through every page." In the "Apologetical Dialogue," we read :—

" *Author.*           What they have done 'gainst me  
I am not moved with : if it gave them meat,  
Or got them clothes, 'tis well, that was their end.  
Only amongst them, I am sorry for  
Some better natures, by the rest so drawn  
To run in that vile line.

*Pol.*                               And is this all !  
Will you not answer, then, the libels ?

*Aut.* No.

*Pol.* Nor the Untrussers ?

*Aut.* Neither.

*Pol.* You're undone then.

*Aut.* With whom?

*Pol.* The world.

*Aut.* The bawd!

*Pol.* It will be taken

To be stupidity or tameness in you.

*Aut.* But they that have incensed me can in soul  
Acquit me of that guilt."

A few more lines of this "Dialogue" are worth quoting here:—

*Pol.* They say you are slow,  
And scarce bring forth a play a year.

*Aut.* 'Tis true.  
I would they could not say that I did that!  
There's all the joy that I take in their trade,  
Unless such scribes as these might be proscribed  
Th' abused theatres."

In effect, he says the "Poetaster" was written in fifteen weeks. Jonson told Drummond that "he had many quarrels with Marston, beat him and took his pistol from him, wrote his 'Poetaster' on him; the beginning of them were, that Marston represented him in the stage, in his youth given to venerie."

At the end of the "Dialogue" he says—

"And since the Comic Muse  
Hath proved so ominous to me, I will try  
If TRAGEDY have a more kind aspect. . . .  
Leave me! there's something come into my thought,  
That must and shall be sung high and aloof,  
Safe from the wolf's black jaw and the dull ass's hoof."

Accordingly, "Sejanus: His Fall" was brought out at the Globe, in 1603, with Shakespeare, Burbage, Hemings, and others in the principal parts. It was well received by the more educated of the audience,

but proved "caviare to the general." It was afterwards remodelled, and acquired considerable popularity. Jonson says, in the Dedication to *Esme, Lord Aubigny*: "It is a poem that, if I well remember, in your lordship's sight, suffered no less violence from our people here, than the subject of it did from the rage of the people of Rome; but with a different fate, as, I hope, merit; for this hath outlived their malice, and begot itself a greater favour than he lost, the love of good men." Jonson's continual references to Latin authorities throughout the piece prove how comprehensive and exact was his learning in that department, as in others. He told Drummond: "Northampton was his mortall enimie for beating, on a St. George's day, one of his attenders: He was called before the Councell for his 'Sejanus,' and accused both of poperie and treason by him." This, as Col. Cunningham notes, was Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, the very man against whom Lady Bacon warns her sons Anthony and Francis, as a "dangerous intelligencing man, and no doubt a subtile papist inwardly; a very instrument of the Spanish papists." About the time he was working on this tragedy he had other work in hand, as appears by a note in Henslowe's memorandum-book: "Lent unto Bengemy Johnsone at the appoyntment of E. Alleyn and Wm. Birde, the 22 June, 1602, in earnest of a boocke called 'Richard Crookback,' and for new adycions for Jeronymo, the sum of x lb." It would have been interesting to compare or contrast Jonson's "Richard Crookback" with Shakespeare's "Richard III.;" but the former has perished, like most of the pieces brought out and bought out by the same



managers, because they kept them in their own hands as long as possible.

With the accession of James I., in 1603, when Ben Jonson was thirty, we enter upon our poet's golden prime. Now begins that splendid series of entertainments and masques, stately, fantastic, humorous, composed for princes (as Lord Bacon says) and by princes performed; wherein "the supposed rugged old bard" lavished such inexhaustible stores of exquisite invention and lyrical grace. Now shall come forth—

"The 'Fox,' the 'Alchemist' and 'Silent Woman,'  
Done by Ben Jonson, and outdone by no man."

Now we find him at the Mermaid, whose very name is a thrill of inspiration; in that Club founded by Sir Walter Raleigh, and composed of Shakespeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, Selden, Donne, and others only less illustrious, a constellation of genius perhaps unequalled before or since, save by the Periclean guests of the Banquet of Plato. In these reunions occurred those friendly wit-combats between Shakespeare and Jonson, so excellently characterised by Fuller, who, however, must have been guided by tradition, as he was too young at the time to witness them himself. Beaumont's lines on the subject are so hackneyed that one is rather ashamed to quote them once more, but also so fine and apposite that one can scarcely omit them from a notice of Rare Ben, to whom they are specially addressed from the dull-witted country:—

"What things have we seen  
Done at the MERMAID! heard words that have been  
So nimble, and so full of subtle flame,  
As if that every one from whence they came

Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,  
And had resolved to live a fool the rest  
Of his dull life ; then where there hath been thrown  
Wit able enough to justify the town  
For three days past : wit that might warrant be  
For the whole city to talk foolishly  
Till that were cancelled."

But these splendid years were ushered in by domestic calamity and political persecution. In 1603 the plague is said to have carried off 30,000 persons in London alone. Drummond, to whose notes we must continually recur, as they were taken down fresh from Jonson's own lips, reports: "When the King came in England at that tyme the pest was in London, he [our poet] being in the country at Sir Robert Cotton's house with old Cambden, he saw in a vision his eldest sone, then a child [seven years old] and at London, appear unto him with the mark of a bloodie crosse on his forehead, as if it had been cutted with a sword, at which amazed he prayed unto God, and in the morning he came to Mr. Cambden's chamber to tell him ; who persuaded him it was but ane apprehension of his fantasie, at which he sould not be disjected ; in the mean tyme comes there letters from his wife, of the death of that boy in the plague. He appeared to him (he said) of a manlie shape, and of that grouth that he thinks he shall be at the resurrection." \* Epigram 45 is dedicated to

\* It seems well to remark here what might have been remarked earlier, in reference to what appears the rather incongruous spelling of some of these notes, that what is termed the "literal transcript" may be not quite literal, although strictly verbal, having been made by the well-known Edinburgh antiquary and physician, Sir Robert Sibbald, probably about the end of the eighteenth century. He may have sometimes modernised, sometimes not.

the memory of this his first son, who was named after him ; it contains the distich—

“ Rest in soft peace, and asked, say here doth lie  
BEN JONSON, his best piece of Poetry.”

Continuing from Drummond : “ He was delated by Sir James Murray to the King, for writing something against the Scots, in a play ‘ Eastward Hoe,’ and voluntarily imprissoned himself with Chapman and Marston, who had written it amongst them. The report was, that they should then [have] had their ears cut [*i.e.*, slit] and noses. After their delivery, he banqueted all his friends ; there was Camden, Selden, and others ; at midst of the feast his old mother dranke to him, and shew him a paper which she had (if the sentence had taken execution) to have mixed in the prisson among his drinke, which was full of lustie strong poison, and that she was no churle, she told, she minded first to have drunk of it herself.” High-hearted old dame ! lofty as the loftiest of Sparta or Rome ! Can we wonder at the indomitableness of the son of such a mother ? Nor must we pass without notice his own magnanimity in joining of his own free will his colleagues in prison, when secure in court-favour, and although he had no hand in the incriminated passage. “ Eastward Hoe ! ” “ an uncommonly sprightly and good-natured comedy,” seems to have been brought out in 1604 ; and, as the passage was suppressed in most of the copies printed in 1605, it may be well to give it, as quoted by Gifford from “ Old Plays,” vol. iv., p. 250 : “ You shall live freely there [in the then new settlement of Virginia] without serjeants, or courtiers,

or lawyers, or intelligencers: only a few industrious Scots, perhaps, who indeed are dispersed over the face of the whole earth. But as for them, there are no greater friends to Englishmen and England when they are out on't, in the world, than they are: and, for my part, I would a hundred thousand of them were there, for we are all one countrymen now, ye know, and we should find ten times more comfort of them there than here." It would be a perfervid Scot indeed who in our days could not smile with serene superiority at such banter as this. In the following year, 1605, Jonson was again in prison with Chapman for some other play in which they had been jointly concerned, as appears by his manly letter to the Earl of Salisbury, begging his influence—not for pardon, as he denied any guilt—but for a speedy hearing, which they obtained, and were released.

In this year the magnificent comedy, "Volpone; or, The Fox," was produced at the Globe, Shakespeare's name not appearing this time in the list of the chief performers. It was soon afterwards acted with great applause at both the Universities, to which, when first printed, it was inscribed: "To the most noble and most equal sisters the two famous Universities, for their love and acceptance shown to this Poem in the presentation; Ben Jonson, the grateful acknowledger, dedicates both It and Himself." The subscription is: "From my House in the Black-Friars, this 11th day of February, 1607." The whole Dedication is a model of stately and vigorous eloquence, vindicating true poetry from the disgrace which has been brought upon it by vile pretenders, and vindicating himself from any fellowship with

those who pandered to the coarse and profane lusts of the populace. Here are a few of its weighty sentences: "But it will here be hastily answered, that the writers of these days are other things; that not only their manners, but their natures are inverted, and nothing remaining with them of the dignity of poet, but the abused name, which every scribe usurps; that now, especially in dramatic, or, as they term it, stage-poetry, nothing but ribaldry, profanation, blasphemy, all license of offence to God and man is practised. I dare not deny a great part of this, I am sorry I dare not, because in some men's abortive features (and would they had never boasted the light) it is over true: but that all are embarked in this bold adventure for hell is a most uncharitable thought, and, uttered, a more malicious slander. For my particular, I can, and from a most clear conscience, affirm, that I have ever trembled to think toward the least profaneness; have loathed the use of such foul and unwashed bawdry, as is now made the food of the scene: and, howsoever I cannot escape from some, the imputation of sharpness, but that they will say, I have taken a pride, or lust to be bitter, and not my youngest infant but hath come into the world with all his teeth; I would ask of these supercilious politics, what nation, society, or general order or state I have provoked? What public person? Whether I have not in all these preserved their dignity, as mine own person, safe? My works are read, allowed (I speak of those that are entirely mine), look into them, what broad reproofs have I used? where have I been particular? where personal? except to a mimic, cheater, bawd, or buffoon, crea-

tures, for their insolencies, worthy to be taxed? Yet to which of these so pointingly, as he might not either ingenuously have confest, or wisely dissembled his disease?" In the Prologue he answers those who said that he was a year about a play:—

"To this there needs no lie, but this his creature,  
Which was two months since no feature;  
And though he dares give them five lives to mend it,  
'Tis known, five weeks fully penned it,  
From his own hand, without a coadjutor,  
Novice, journeyman, or tutor."

Gifford well observes: "No human powers could have completed such a work in such a time, unless the author's mind had been previously stored with all the treasure of ancient and modern learning, on which he might draw at pleasure. . . . Before Jonson was three-and-twenty, he had mastered the Greek and Roman classics, and was at the period of which we are now speaking, among the first scholars of the age;" and Lord Falkland (Clarendon's Falkland, killed at the battle of Newbury, in that great civil war which was breaking his heart), writes in his excellent and earnest "Eglogue on the Death of Ben Jonson":\*—

"His learning such, no author old nor new,  
Escaped his reading that deserved his view,  
And such his judgment, so exact his test,  
Of what was best in books, as what books best,

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\* From another couplet of this piece Milton may have derived the hint for a famous passage in one of his prose works, contemning the authority of the Fathers:—

"And Time, like what our brooks act in our sight,  
Oft sinks the weighty, and upholds the light."

That had he joined those notes his labours took,  
From each most praised, and praise-deserving book,  
And could the world of that choice treasure boast,  
It need not care though all the rest were lost :  
And such his wit, he writ past what he quotes,  
And his productions far exceed his notes."

His reputation now stood so high that he was continually being called upon to assist in writing and inventing, usually in conjunction with Inigo Jones, the superb and imaginative masques and entertainments, which were the delight of the court, the city, the gentry, in those barbarous times: public pageants and solemnities how inferior, intellectually and artistically, to the dishevelled scramble of our royal drawing-rooms and levees, to the danceless crush of our state balls, to our Mansion House and Guildhall feasts, with their gorgeous gorging and vinous after-elocquence! He received periodical sums, not only from public bodies, but from several of the nobility and gentry, as a sort of retaining fees to command his services whenever they might be required. In 1609 appeared, "Epicœne; or, the Silent Woman," first performed by the Children of His Majesty's Revels. When printed it soon ran through several editions, and as a stage-play was long the most popular of his works. This was followed, in 1610, by the third—and, I think, with Gifford, the greatest of the supreme three—"The Alchemist." It is dedicated "To the Lady most deserving her Name and Blood, Lady Mary Wroth," one of the noble Sidneys (niece of Sir Philip) he so worthily loved and honoured, and who so worthily loved and honoured him. Epigrams 103 and 105 are addressed to her, of which the former may be in part cited here:—

“How well, fair crown of your fair sex, might he  
That but the twilight of your sprite did see,  
And noted for what flesh such souls were framed,  
Know you to be a SIDNEY, though unnamed !  
And being named, how little doth that name  
Need any Muse’s praise to give it fame ;  
Which is itself the imprese of the great,  
And glory of them all, but to repeat !”

To her husband, Sir Robert Wroth, the third piece in the “Forest” is addressed. From the quarto of 1612 Gifford retrieved a pregnant advertisement to the reader: “If thou beest more, thou art an Understander, and then I trust thee. . . . But how out of purpose and place do I name art? When the professors are grown so obstinate contemnners of it, and presumers on their own naturals, as they are deriders of all diligence that way, and by simple mocking at the terms, when they understand not the things, think to get off wittily with their ignorance. Nay, they are esteemed the more learned and sufficient for this, by the many, through their excellent vice of judgment. For they commend writers as they do fencers or wrestlers; who, if they come in robustuously, and put for it with a great deal of violence, are received for the braver fellows: when many times their own rudeness is the cause of their disgrace, and a little touch of their adversary gives all that boisterous force the foil. [This sentence is reproduced in his “Discoveries,” in the section *Censura de Poetis*.] I deny not that these men, who always seek to do more than enough, may some time happen on some thing that is good and great—but very seldom; and when it comes it doth not recompense the rest of their ill. It sticks out, perhaps, and is more eminent,



because all is sordid and vile about it, as lights are more discerned in a thick darkness than a faint shadow." About this time Jonson, who had deeply studied the grounds of the controversy between the Reformed and Roman Churches, and convinced himself of the delusions of Popery, made a solemn recantation of his errors, and was re-admitted into the bosom of the Church, which he had abandoned twelve years before. Drummond reports: "After he was reconciled with the Church, and left of to be a recusant, at his first communion, in token of true reconciliation, he drank out all the full cup of wyne," whereon Gifford remarks that his feelings were always strong, and the energy of his character was impressed upon every act of his life. Yet, without any pretence or authority, Gifford goes on to assert that this story is foisted into the *Conversations* by Drummond! and then, with another inconsistency, he observes that more wine was drunk at the altar in the poet's day than ours, as if to make an act common which Drummond records because peculiar. But whenever Church and State are in question—the Church and State of most narrow and insular England—Gifford's logical acuteness and clear judgment desert him; he is possessed by the demon of the *Quarterly*—not the old Lady of our times, with wig and false teeth and well-pared nails, and voice that quavers in its scolding, but the young Fury of the young century, brandishing fiery torches, agitating her serpent locks.

## III

In 1611 "Catiline, his Conspiracy," was brought out; a noble tragedy of its class, being what Jonson termed "a legitimate *Poem*," full-charged from the ancient authorities, and abounding with a truly Roman energy, from the opening speech of the Ghost of Sylla, terrific in its imprecations and its introduction of the ferocious and atrocious conspirator, to the final narrative of his defeat and death delivered by Petreius. Macaulay, it appears, has written somewhere that "Ben's heroic couplets resemble blocks rudely hewn out by an unpractised hand with a blunt hatchet," and that they are "jagged, mis-shapen distiches." This judgment, like most others of his absolute lordship, is a great deal too sweeping. Jonson, in common with nearly all his contemporaries, has, indeed, many very rude heroic couplets; but he has likewise many quite harmonious and stately in rhythm, while informed, moreover, with such vigour as is scarcely found after Dryden. Thus, in this proemium of the Ghost of Sylla:—

"Dost thou not feel me, Rome? not yet! is night  
So heavy on thee, and my weight so light?  
Can Sylla's ghost arise within thy walls,  
Less threatening than an earthquake the quick falls  
Of thee and thine? Shake not the frightened heads  
Of thy steep towers, or shrink to their first beds?  
Or, as their ruin the large Tyber fills,  
Make that swell up and drown thy seven proud hills?

What sleep is this doth seize thee so like death,  
And is not it? Wake, feel her in my breath:

Behold, I come, sent from the Stygian sound,  
As a dire vapour that had cleft the ground,  
To ingender with the night, and blast the day;  
Or like a pestilence that should display  
Infection through the world : which thus I do"——

[*The curtain draws, and CATILINE is discovered in his study.*]

If this trumpet-blast be uttered in "jagged, mis-shapen distiches," I make over my ears to the man who does the doleful elegies for *Punch*, that he may have a suitable second pair ready in case he should lose his own, which are generally recognised as the worst in the three kingdoms.

This work, which is said to have been the author's favourite, was published in quarto in the same year, with a dedication, "To the Great Example of Honour and Virtue, the Most Noble William, Earl of Pembroke," the son of Sir Philip Sidney's sister, to whom he also dedicated the Epigrams, and addressed No. 102. There were also prefixed characteristic addresses to the Reader in Ordinary and to the Reader Extraordinary. To the first he says: "The muses forbid that I should restrain your meddling, whom I see already busy with the title and tricking over the leaves: it is your own. I departed with my right when I let it first abroad; and now, so secure an interpreter I am of my chance, that neither praise nor dispraise from you can affect me. Though you commend the two first acts, with the people, because they are the worst; and dislike the oration of Cicero [Act iv., Sc. 2], in regard you read some pieces of it at school and understand them not yet: I shall find the way to forgive you. Be anything you will at your own charge. . . . But I leave you to your exercise.

Begin." To the other he says briefly: "You I would understand to be the better man, though places in court go otherwise: to you I submit myself and work. Farewell."

In 1612 the death of Prince Henry put a stop for the time to all festivities at court, and Jonson took advantage of this interval, when his services were not required for masques or entertainments, to visit the Continent. Drummond reports: "S. W. Raulighe sent him governour with his Son, anno 1613, to France. This youth being knavishly inclyned, among other pastimes . . . caused him to be drunken, and dead drunk, so that he knew not wher he was, thereafter laid him on a carr, which he made to be drawn by pioners through the streets, at every corner showing his governour stretched out, and telling them that was a more lively image of the Crucifix than any they had: at which sport young Raughlie's mother delyghted much (saying, his father young was so inclyned) though the Father abhorred it." This young scapegrace Walter, as Col. Cunningham notes, accompanied his father on his last fatal expedition, and was killed in an ambush on the banks of the Orinoco, on New Year's Day, 1618, in his twenty-third year.

In 1614 "Bartholomew Fair" was produced at the Hope Theatre, on the Bank-side. Its subject, its multitude of familiar characters, its broad humour, its ridicule of the "Puritans (most delectable to Gifford), combined to make it extremely popular; and it is said to have first called forth the "O rare Ben Jonson!" afterwards placed for all epitaph upon his tombstone. It was followed, in 1616, by "The

Devil is an Ass," a capital comedy, satirising monopolists and projectors, and exposing pretended demoniacs and witch-finders. Neither of these is in the excellent folio of 1616, which was carefully revised by the author, and contains, in addition to the other dramas already mentioned, several masques and entertainments, the Epigrams, and the collection of poems called the "Forest." The two last-named comedies may have been excluded by the fact that the volume was carried through the press some considerable time before its publication. Gifford says: "He seems to have meditated a complete edition of all his works; but he apparently grew weary towards the conclusion of the volume, and never (unless peculiarly called upon) had recourse to the press afterwards. The second folio is a wretched continuation of the first, printed from MSS. surreptitiously obtained during his life, or ignorantly hurried through the press after his death. It bears a variety of dates, from 1631 to 1641 inclusive. It is probable that he looked forward to a period of retirement and ease, when he might be enabled to collect, revise, and publish his works at leisure; but the loss of all his MSS. by fire, and the fatal illness which almost immediately afterwards seized him, rendered all such views abortive. It is remarkable that he calls his Epigrams 'Book the First:' he had, therefore, others in his hand; but they have perished." On which it may be observed that in the course of the nine years following, during which he produced nothing for the stage proper, though he wrote some masques, it seems likely that he had leisure enough for carrying out such a plan, if he had been bent upon doing so. It

was at this period that James conferred upon him, by letters patent, a yearly pension of one hundred marks, thus constituting him the first regular Poet Laureate, in the modern sense. "Hitherto the laureateship appears to have been a mere title, adopted at pleasure by those who were employed to write for the court, but conveying no privileges, and establishing no claim to a salary. Occasional gratuities were undoubtedly bestowed on occasional services, but an annual determinate sum seems to have been issued for the first time in favour of Jonson."

In the summer of 1618, in response to a warm invitation, he made his celebrated journey to Scotland, where he had many friends, especially among the connections of the Duke of Lenox, whom we have already met with as Lord Aubigny. His journey was made on foot, and he appears to have spent several months with the nobility and gentry in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh. Taylor, the Water-Poet, in his "Pennyless Pilgrimage," writes: "Now the day before I came from Edenborough I went to Leeth, where I found my long approved and assured good friend, Master Benjamin Johnson, at one Master John Stuart's house. I thanke him for his great kindnesse towards me: for at my taking leave of him, he gave me a piece of gold of two-and-twenty shillings to drink his health in England; and withall willed me to remember his kind commendations to all his friends. So with a friendly farewell I left him as well as I hope never to see him in a worse estate; for he is amongst Noblemen and Gentlemen that knowe his true worth, and their own honours, where with much respective [respectful] love he is worthily entertained."

This was about the 20th September. He paid many other visits, including one to the elegant and scholarly poet, William Drummond of Hawthornden, near Edinburgh.\* This, according to Gifford, occupied the greater part of April 1619; but, as Col. Cunningham shows, it clearly occurred before January 17, 1619.† Drummond, as we are all aware, took notes of his conversations; and of these I can discover no reason to doubt the substantial accuracy, in spite of the furious raging of Gifford; nor can I see that the conversations thus reported derogate in any degree from the character or judgment of Jonson. But Drummond pretended a cordial amity for his guest, writing after the visit, on the 17th January, 1619: "If there be any other thing in this country (unto which my power can reach), command it; *there is nothing I wish more than to be in the calendar of*

\* Lamb, in his "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading," says: "Shall I be thought fantastical if I confess that the names of some of our poets sound sweeter, and have a finer relish to the ear—to mine, at least—than that of Milton or of Shakespeare? It may be that the latter are more staled and rung upon in common discourse. The sweetest names, and which carry a perfume in the mention, are, Kit Marlowe [Lamb, as an intimate, had the right to call him Kit], Drayton, Drummond of Hawthornden, and Cowley." In the same essay, by-the-bye, he says of the Life of the Duke of Newcastle, by his Duchess, concerning which I have already quoted him: "No casket is rich enough, no casing sufficiently durable to honour and keep safe such a jewel."

† Col. Cunningham points out that Gifford errs in some dates relating to this visit or depending upon the "Conversations," through ignorance of the fact that in *Scotland* the year began on the 1st January after A.D. 1600. Thus he places Drummond's letter of January, 1619, *after* Jonson's letters of May and July, 1619—which, of course, would have been the proper order had Drummond been an Englishman, dating in the then English style.

*them who love you ;*” and signing, “Your loving friend, W. D.” Yet, as an appendix to the Notes, which are dated only two days after this, we find that bitter character of Ben Jonson which has, naturally enough, given rise to so much controversy and to so much obloquy on one side and the other. Having been long chiefly quoted for detraction of the guest, it is now principally applied to the disgrace of the host ; and I must confess that, all things considered, the latter use seems to me more just than the former. Col. Cunningham attempts to mitigate judgment, but not without faltering : “I have no doubt that Drummond, a valetudinarian and ‘minor poet,’ was thoroughly borne down by the superior powers, physical and mental, of Jonson, and heartily glad when he saw the last of his somewhat boisterous and somewhat arrogant guest. The picture drawn by one who thus felt himself ‘sat upon’ at every turn was not likely to be a flattering one ; and yet there is nothing in the Conversations to lead us to expect that the portrait given at the end of them would be composed entirely of shadows. But may we not suppose that on the 24th of January 1619, on his way to Leith, Jonson may have passed the night at Hawthornden, and, full of the idea of returning home, and warmed with the generous liquors, for the abundance and quality of which—

‘The heart of Scotland, Britain’s other eye,’

has always been famous, have forgotten that he was at the table of a prim Scotch laird, and dreaming himself already in the Apollo or at the Mermaid, given vent to each feeling as it rose ; whether vanity,



scorn, contempt, ridicule, mistrust, boasting, love of country and friends, passionate kindness, regardlessness of money and gain, eagerness to conquer, and readiness to own himself vanquished? Had Drummond waited till time and distance had mellowed his feelings, he would, I am persuaded, have employed some such terms as I have here substituted for the harsher sounding synonyms actually recorded." The explanation is plausible; but, in answer to the kindly-meant palliation, we are constrained to ask the simple question: Why, then, did Drummond preserve unaltered this "portrait composed almost entirely of shadows," to be found at his death, thirty years afterwards, and when Jonson had been long dead, among his papers, and exhibited to the world as the true likeness of the great man to whom he signed himself, "Your loving friend?" To myself the conduct of Drummond in this instance appears marked by meanness and tainted with duplicity; and open-hearted Ben seems to have fared about as badly at his hands as Blake would have fared at the hands of Hayley, had the latter noted down his conversations and drawn his portrait after his residence at Felpham. The portrait itself will find its fitting place when I come to discuss the character of Jonson; here it will be sufficient to give a few of the more interesting notes not already cited: "He had ane intention to perfect ane Epick Poeme intituled 'Heroologia, or the Worthies of this Country rowsed by Fame;' and was to dedicate it to his Country: it is all in couplets, for he detesteth all other rimes. For a Heroik poeme, he said, ther was no such ground as King Arthur's fiction"—a judgment in which he was followed by

Milton and Dryden. "That Sir R. Aiton loved him dearly. That Chapman and Fletcher were loved of him. That next himself, only Fletcher and Chapman could make a Mask. That Sir John Roe loved him ; and when they two were ushered by my lord Suffolk from a Mask, Roe wrott a moral Epistle to him, which began, '*That next to playes, the Church and the State were the best. God threateneth Kings, Kings Lords, as Lords do us.*'—Sir John Roe was an infinite spender, and used to say, when he had no more to spende he could die. He died in his armes of the pest, and he furnished his charges 20 lb. ; which was given him back.—S. W. [Raleigh] heth written the lyfe of Queen Elizabeth, of which ther is copies extant.—He was Master of Arts in both the Universities by their favour, not his studie.—He can set horoscopes, but trusts not in them. He with the consent of a friend cousened a lady, with whom he had made ane appointment to meet ane old Astrologer, in the suburbs, which she kepted ; and it was himself dysgysed in a longe gowne and a whyte beard at the light of dimm burning candles, up in a little cabinet reached unto by a ledder.—Being at the end of my Lord Salisburie's table with Inigo Jones, and demanded by my Lord, Why he was not glad? 'My Lord,' said he, 'yow promised I should dine with yow, bot I doe not,' for he had none of his meate ; he esteemed only that his meate which was of his own dish.—He heth consumed a whole night in lying looking to his great toe, about which he hath seen Tartars and Turks, Romans and Carthaginians, feight in his own imagination. [Col. Cunningham notes : Jonson was a free liver, and loved generous wines.

He seems to be describing sleepless nights during a well-earned attack of gout.]—He hath a minde to be a churchman, and so he might have favour to make one sermon to the King, he careth not what thereafter should befall him : for he would not flatter though he saw Death.—At his hither coming [on foot] Sr. Francis Bacon said to him, He loved not to sie Poesy goe on other feet than poeticall Dactylus and Spondus.—He never esteemed of a man for the name of a Lord.—Queen Elizabeth never saw herself, after she became old, in a true glass ; they painted her, and sometymes would vermilion her nose. She had allwayes about Christmass evens set dice that threw sixes or five, and she knew not they were other, to make her win and esteame herself fortunate. That she had a membrana on her, which made her incapable of man, though for her delight she tried many. At the coming over of Monsieur, ther was a French chirurgion who took in hand to cut it, yett fear stayed her and his death. King Philip had intention by dispensation of the Pope to have married her.—It were good that the half of the preachers of England were plain ignorants, for that either in their sermons they flatter, or strive to shew their own eloquence.—That he wrott all his [verses] first in prose, for so his Master, Cambden, had learned him.—That the half of his Comedies were not in print.—He hath a pastorall intituled *The May Lord*. . . .—He hath intention to writt a fisher or pastorall play, and set the stage of it in the Lowmond lake. He is to writt his foot Pilgrimage hither and to call it a *Discoverie*. In a poem he calleth *Edinborough*—

‘The heart of Scotland, Britaines other eye.’

—A play of his, upon which he was accused, The Divell is ane Ass; according to 'Comedia Vetus,' in England the Divel was brought in either with one Vice or other: the play done, the Divel carried away the Vice, he brings in the Divel so overcome with the wickedness of this age that thought himself ane Ass. Parergous is discoursed of the Duke of Drounland [Act ii., Sc. 1]: the King desired him to conceal it.—He hath commented and translated Horace Art of Poesie: it is in Dialogue wayes; by Criticus he understandeth Dr. Done.—He had ane intention to have made a play like Plautus Amphitrio, but left it of, for that he could never find two so like others [each other] that he could persuade the spectators they were one.—He said to Prince Charles of Inigo Jones, that when he wanted words to express the greatest villaine in the world, he would call him ane Inigo. Jones having accused him for naming him, behind his back, A foole: he denied it; but, says he, I said, He was ane arrant knave, and I avouch it.—Of all his Playes he never gained two hundreth pounds.—His Impressa was a compass with one foot in center, the other broken, the word, *Deest quod duceret orbem*.—He said to me, that I was too good and simple, and that oft a man's modestie made a fool of his witt.—His armes were three spindles or *rhombi*; his own word about them, *Percunctabor* or *Perscrutator*. His Epitaph, by a companion written, is—

'Here lyes BENJAMIN JOHNSON dead,  
And hath no more wit than [a] goose in his head :  
That as he was wont, so doth he still,  
Live by his wit, and evermore will.'

Ane other :—

‘ Here lyes honest Ben,  
That had not a beard on his chen.’

[As Col. Cunningham observes, in the best portrait Jonson has thin black whiskers, and hardly any beard. In compensation, he had a huge fell of jet black hair, which, in his younger days, must have given great dignity to his manly and thoughtful face.] —In his *Sejanus* he hath translated a whole oration of Tacitus.—J. Selden liveth on his owne, is the *Law Book* of the Judges of England, the bravest man in all languages.—He dissuaded me from *Poetrie*, for that she had beggered him, when he might have been a rich lawer, physitian, or marchant. [Already cited.] —He was better versed, and knew more in Greek and Latin, than all the Poets in England, and quintessence their brains [meaning, probably, that in his notes and extracts he had the quintessence of the classical authors, as remarked by Lord Falkland in the lines before quoted].—Of all styles he loved most to be named Honest, and hath of that ane hundredth letters so naming him. He went from Lieth homeward the 25 January 1619, in a pair of shoes which, he told, lasted him since he came from Darnton [Darlington?], which he minded to take back that farr againe: they were appearing like *Coriat's*: the first two dayes he was all excoriate. [In 1611, the “*Alchemist*” year, in kindly jest Jonson had arranged “that immense farrago of burlesque ‘testimonies to the author’s merit’ which accompanied the first appearance of ‘*Coryat's Crudities*.’ In this he seems to have engaged at the desire of Prince Henry, who

found entertainment in laughing at the simple vanity of 'The Odcombian Traveller.'"]—If he died by the way, he promised to send me his papers of this Country, hewen as they were. I have to send him descriptions of Edinborough, Borrow Lawes, of the Lowmond.—He sent to me this Madrigal: 'On a Lover's Dust, made Sand for ane Houre Glasse,' and that which is (as he said) a Picture of himselfe.—When his play of a Silent Woman was first acted, ther was found verses after on the stage against him, concluding that that play was well named the Silent Woman ther was never one man to say Plaudite to it." [This follows the character and concludes the notes.] On the tenth of May, 1619, Jonson writes: "To my worthy, honoured, and beloved friend, Mr. W. Drummond. Most loving and beloved sir,—I am arrived safely, with a most catholic welcome, and my reports not unacceptable to his Majesty. He professed (I thank God) some joy to see me, and is pleased to hear of the purpose of my book: to which I most earnestly solicit you for your promise of the inscriptions at Pinky, some things concerning the Loch of Lomond, touching the government of Edinburgh, to urge Mr. James Scot, and what else you can procure for me with all speed (especially I make it my request that you will enquire for me whether the Students method at St. Andrews be the same with that of Edinburgh, and so to assure me, or wherein they differ). . . . Salute the beloved Fentons, the Nisbets, the Scots, the Levingstons, and all the honest and honoured names with you, especially Mr. James Writh, his wife, your sister, &c. And if you forget yourself, you believe not in Your most true

friend and lover, Ben Jonson." Drummond answers in July: "Worthy Friend [a cold-blooded address!], The uncertainty of your abode was a cause of my silence this time past—I have adventured this packet upon hopes that a man so famous cannot be in any place either of the City or Court, where he shall not be found out. In my last (the missing letter) I sent you a description of Loch Lomond, with map of Inchmerionach, which may, by your book, be made most famous," &c. The book was never published, the MS. being destroyed by fire.

As the poem "My Picture left in Scotland" is not only very beautiful, but of special interest for its brave uncompromising self-portraiture, I quote it in Drummond's version, which appears rather superior than inferior to that in the text, "Underwoods," vii.—

"I doubt that Love is rather deaf than blind,  
For else it could not be  
That she  
Whom I adore so much should so slight me,  
And cast my suit behind:  
I'm sure my language to her is as sweet,  
And all my closes meet  
In numbers of as subtile feet  
As makes the youngest he  
That sits in shadow of Apollo's tree.

O! but my conscious fears,  
That fly my thoughts between,  
Prompt me that she hath seen  
My hundred of grey hairs,  
Told six and forty years,  
Read so much waste as she cannot embrace  
My mountain belly and my rocky face,  
And all these, through her eyes, have stopt her ears."

## IV

As already mentioned, during the nine years from 1616 to 1625, Jonson produced nothing for the stage. "It is probable that Jonson spent much of his time at the country seats of the nobility and gentry, as he has allusions to several visits of this kind, and we know that he attended on the court in some of the royal progresses. He was at Burleigh on the Hill, and at Belvoir Castle, and at Windsor when his masque of the 'Gipsies Metamorphosed' was performed at these places respectively, and introduced several little compliments into the piece, as new candidates arrived and claimed admission into the list of the *dramatis personæ*. He must also have been at Newmarket with the court, where his masques were occasionally represented." In 1618 he had an opportunity of serving his old and firm friend, Selden, who had grievously offended James by the indirect tendency of his arguments on the Divine right of tithes. In the "Life of Selden" it is stated: "The storm was blown over by the interest of his friend Ben Jonson with the king." Fresh offence, however, was taken soon afterwards, and Selden was summoned to Theobalds, where his Majesty then was: "Not being as yet acquainted with the court or with the king, he got Master Ben Jonson, who was then at Theobalds, to introduce him." In the summer of 1619, after his return from Scotland, he went to Oxford at the invitation of Dr. (afterwards Bishop) Corbet, still remembered for some graceful verses, then senior scholar of Christ Church. He remained there some time, and the



degree of Master of Arts was conferred on him in July. In October, 1621, the king, who seems to have been unusually pleased with the "Gipsies Metamorphosed," in which he himself, with Prince Charles and Buckingham, took part, bestowed on Ben the reversion of the office of Master of the Revels. The letters patent grant to "our beloved servant Benjamin Jonson, gentleman, the said office, to be held and enjoyed by him and his assigns, during his life, from and after the death of Sir George Buc and Sir John Astley, or as soon as the office shall become vacant by resignation, forfeiture, or surrender." He received no benefit from this grant, as Sir John Astley survived him; but when in his last illness he felt himself incapable of fulfilling the duties of the office should it devolve on him, was allowed by Charles to transfer the patent to his son, who, however, died before himself, in 1635. Gifford quotes from a letter of the celebrated Joseph Mead, of C. Col., Cambridge, to Sir Martin Stuteville: "A friend told me this Faire time (Stourbridge) that Ben Jonson was not knighted, but scaped it narrowly, for that his Majestie would have done it, had there not been means made (himself not unwilling) to avoyd it. Sep 15, 1821."

Probably about 1623 occurred the fire recorded in his "Execration upon Vulcan" ("Underwoods," lxii.), beginning—

"And why to me this? thou lame Lord of Fire!  
 What had I done that might call on thine ire?  
 Or urge thy greedy flame thus to devour  
 So many my years' labour in an hour?"

. . . . .

Was it because thou wert of old denied,  
By Jove, to have Minerva for thy bride ;  
That since, thou tak'st all envious care and pain  
To ruin every issue of the brain ?”

After enumerating many sorts and samples of literature which would have made a fit meal for Vulcan to lick up, he specifies his own chief manuscript losses :—

“ But in my desk what was there to accite  
So ravenous and vast an appetite ?  
I dare not say a body, but some parts  
There were of search, and mastery in the arts.  
All the old Venusine, in poetry,  
And lighted by the Stagerite, could spy,  
Was there made English : with a grammar too,  
To teach some that their nurses could not do,  
The purity of Language ; and, among  
The rest, my journey into Scotland sung,  
With all the adventures : three books, not afraid  
To speak the fate of the Sicilian maid,  
To our own ladies : and in story there  
Of our fifth Henry, eight of his nine year ;  
Wherein was oil, beside the succours spent,  
Which noble Carew, Cotton, Selden lent :  
And twice twelve years stored up humanity ;  
With humble gleanings in divinity,—  
After the fathers, and those wiser guides  
Whom faction had not drawn to study sides.”

It is probable that the pastoral of the “ May Lord,” which he mentioned to Drummond, as well as other dramas, were likewise destroyed. As Gifford remarks : “ There is a degree of wit and vivacity in these verses [the whole of the “ Execration ”] which does no little credit to the equanimity of the poet, who speaks of a loss so irreparable to him, not only with forbearance, but with pleasantry and good humour.” Of these

works and notes nothing remains except the version of Horace's "Art of Poetry," and dislocated fragments of the English Grammar. The translation was made so early as 1604, but not published until 1640, after his death, from transcripts which Gifford tells have variations in almost every line, while all, perhaps, vary from the original manuscript destroyed in the fire. The commentary from Aristotle's "Poetics" is wholly lost, unless a few of its notes be preserved in the "Discoveries." The journey into Scotland, with all the adventures, must have been specially interesting; more interesting even, on account of the period at which it was performed, than that of his namesake to the Hebrides. "The 'Rape of Proserpine' (the Sicilian maid) may not, perhaps, be much regretted; but the destruction of the 'History of Henry V.,' which was so nearly completed, must ever be considered as a serious misfortune. The vigorous and masculine elegance of Jonson's style, the clearness of his judgment, the precision of his intelligence, aided by the intimate knowledge of domestic and general history possessed by Carew (George, Lord Carew), Cotton, and Selden, three of the most learned men of that or any other age, could not have been exerted without producing a work of which, if spared to us, we might be justly proud." And the immense value of the stored up humanity of twice twelve years, and the humble gleanings in divinity, irretrievably perished, may be estimated by the lines already quoted (p. 101), from Lord Falkland, to whom it is now proposed to raise a memorial near the spot where he was killed, and of whom Lord Clarendon, in his "History of the Rebellion," writes: "Thus fell that incomparable

young man, in the four-and-thirtieth year of his age, having so much despatched the business of life, that the oldest rarely attain to that immense knowledge, and the youngest enter not into the world with more innocence; and whosoever leads such a life needs not care upon how short warning it be taken from him." Jonson had an excellent library, having begun very early to collect the best editions of the classics and all sorts of rare and valuable works. Thus, as cited by Gifford, Selden, whose sole testimony on this point is more than sufficient, writes to him in 1615: "With regard to what the Greeks and Latins have of Andargatis, Deresto, Atargata, Derce (all one name), &c., you best know, being more conversant in the recondite parts of human learning." And he concludes, after a variety of extracts from the Hebrew, Syriac, Greek, &c.: "In the connection of these no vulgar observations, if they had been to a common learned reader, there had been often room for divers pieces of theology dispersed in Latin and Greek authors, and fathers of the Church; but your own most choice and able store cannot but furnish you with whatever is fit that way to be thought. Whatever I have here collected, I consecrate to your love, and end with hope of your instructing judgment." And in the "Titles of Honour" he introduced a chapter, "On the custom of giving crowns of laurel to poets," at the end of which he says: "Thus have I, by no unseasonable digression, performed a promise to you, my beloved Ben Jonson. Your curious learning and judgment may correct where I have erred, and add where my notes and memory have left me short." And in the same work (first ed., fol., 1614)

he states: "I presume that I have sufficiently manifested this out of Euripides his *Orestes*, which, when I was to use, not having the scholiast, out of whom I hoped some aid, I went for this purpose to see it in the well furnisht librarie of my beloved friend, that singular poet, Master Ben Jonson, whose special worth in literature, accurate judgment, and performance, known only to that few which are truly able to know him, hath had from me, ever since I began to learn, an increasing admiration." How cordially Jonson reciprocated this affection and esteem of "the Law Book of the Judges of England, the bravest man in all languages," may be read in his "Epistle to Master John Selden" ("Underwoods," xxxi.) prefixed to the first edition of "Titles of Honour." I have space for but a few lines:—

"You that have been  
Ever at home, yet have all countries seen;  
And like a compass, keeping one foot still  
Upon your centre, do your circle fill  
Of general knowledge; watched men, manners too,  
Heard what times past have said, seen what ours do!

I wondered at the richness, but am lost  
To see the workmanship so exceed the cost!  
To mark the excellent seasoning of your style,  
And manly elocution! not one while  
With horror rough, then rioting with wit;  
But to the subject still the colours fit,  
In sharpness of all search, wisdom of choice,  
Newness of sense, antiquity of voice!

I yield, I yield. The matter of your praise  
Flows in upon me, and I cannot raise  
A bank against it: nothing but the round  
Large clasp of Nature such a wit can bound.  
Monarch in letters! 'mongst the Titles shown  
Of others' honours, thus enjoy thy own."

James I. died early in 1625, and in him our poet "lost the most indulgent of masters, and most benevolent of sovereigns. Charles, indeed, both knew and valued Jonson; but he was not so competent a judge of literary talents, nor was he, either by nature or habit, so familiar with his servants, or so condescending to their affairs, as the easy and good-natured James. . . . Two evils were at this time rapidly gaining upon the poet—want and disease. The first he certainly might have warded off, at least for some time, had he been gifted with the slightest portion of economy; but he was altogether thoughtless and profuse, and his long sickness, therefore, overtook him totally unprovided. From the accession to the death of James, nothing is to be found respecting his necessities—not a complaint, not a murmur; but other times were at hand, and we shall soon hear of petitionary poems and supplications for relief. The disease which attacked him about the end of this year was the palsy. He seems to have laboured from his youth under a scorbutic affection (derived, probably, from his parents), which assailed him with increasing virulence as his constitution gave way: to this must be added a tendency to dropsy, not the least of his evils." In all likelihood, driven back to the stage by want, he produced this year that very good comedy, "The Staple of News;" and in the next, 1626, he had so far recovered from the first stroke of the palsy as to be able to compose for the court the antimasque of "The Fortunate Isles, and their Union." In January, 1629, the comedy of "The New Inn; or, The Light Heart" was brought out, and "completely damned," not being heard to the

end. His infirmities had increased: he was no longer able to leave his room, or to move in it without assistance; and this play undoubtedly shows symptoms of impaired powers. The tone of the epilogue is in pathetic contrast to his old confident self-assertion :—

“ Plays in themselves have neither hopes nor fears ;  
Their fate is only in their hearers' ears ;  
If you expect more than you had to-night,  
The maker is sick and sad. But do him right ;  
He meant to please you : for he sent things fit,  
In all the members both of sense and wit,  
If they have not miscarried ! if they have,  
All that his faint and faltering tongue doth crave  
Is that you not impute it to his brain,  
That's yet unhurt, although set round with pain,  
It cannot long hold out. All strength must yield ;  
Yet judgment would the last be in the field  
With a true poet.”

This must have disarmed any generous enemy ; but the sickness of the lion is the sweet opportunity for “the wolf's black jaw and the dull ass's hoof.” The envious and the stupid, wolves and asses, howled, brayed, tore, and kicked at him, till he, who, despite the common preference of a parent for a rickety child, had borne the popular condemnation without any open complaint, was galled into publishing the piece two years afterwards, with this angry title-page : “The New Inn ; or, The Light Heart, a Comedy. As it was never Acted, but most negligently Played by some, the King's Servants ; and more squeamishly beheld and censured by others, the King's Subjects, 1629. Now at last set at Liberty to the Readers, his Majesty's Servants and Subjects, to be judged of,

1631." And, heated with the fire of battle, he recovered his old haughty self-confidence, and rang out vigorous defiance in an ode to himself. I must give three of its six stanzas :—

“Come, leave the loathed stage,  
And the more loathsome age ;  
Where pride and impudence, in faction knit,  
Usurp the chair of wit !  
Indicting and arraigning every day  
Something they call a play.  
Let their fastidious, vain  
Commission of the brain  
Run on and rage, sweat, censure, and condemn ;  
They were not made for thee, less thou for them.

Say that thou pour'st them wheat,  
And they will acorns eat ;  
'Twere simple fury still thyself to waste  
On such as have no taste !  
To offer them a surfeit of pure bread  
Whose appetites are dead !  
No, give them grains their fill,  
Husks, draff to drink and swill :  
If they love lees, and leave the lusty wine,  
Envy them not, their palate's with the swine.

Leave things so prostitute,  
And take the Alcaic lute ;  
Or thine own Horace, or Anacreon's lyre ;  
Warm thee by Pindar's fire :  
And though thy nerves be shrunk and blood be cold  
Ere years have made thee old,  
Strike that disdainful heat  
Throughout, to their defeat,  
As curious fools, and envious of thy strain,  
May, blushing, swear no palsy's in thy brain.”

The spirit of this ode is that which breathes through much of the latest book of Robert Browning,



"Pacchiarotto, and other Poems." Thus the second stanza is remarkably re-echoed in the following :—

"Don't nettles make a broth  
Wholesome for blood grown lazy and thick?  
Maws out of sorts make mouths out of taste.  
My Thirty-four Port—no need to waste  
On a tongue that's fur and a palate—paste!  
A magnum for friends who are sound! the sick  
I'll posset and cosset them, nothing loth,  
Henceforward with nettle-broth!"

This scornful defiance brought several of the minor poets and critics into the field against him; while Randolph, Cleveland, and others who were proud to be called his sons, came to his defence, and some of the best scholars of the time took pleasure in translating the ode into Latin verse. Perhaps the most temperate and fair of the pieces called forth on this occasion was that by T. Carew, of which a specimen may be given :—

"'Tis true, dear Ben, thy just chastising hand  
Hath fixed upon the sotted age a brand  
To their swoln pride, and empty scribbling due;  
It can nor judge, nor write: and yet 'tis true,  
Thy comic muse from the exalted line  
Touched by the Alchemist, doth since decline  
From that her zenith, and fortels a red  
And blushing evening, when she goes to bed;  
Yet such as shall outshine the glimmering light,  
With which all stars shall gild the following night."

The court seems to have neglected Jonson soon after the death of James, as there is no masque by him for the three years between 1626 and 1630; and to this he alluded in the Epilogue to the "New Inn,"

from which I have already quoted : he is speaking of himself in the third person :—

“And had he lived the care of king and queen,  
His art in something more yet had been seen.”

Charles was touched, and replied promptly and royally to the oblique remonstrance, as we learn from “Underwoods,” lxxx. : “An Epigram to King Charles, for an Hundred Pounds he sent me in my Sickness, MDCXXIX,” beginning—

“Great Charles, among the holy gifts of grace,  
Annexed to thy person and thy place,  
'Tis not enough (thy piety is such)  
To cure the called ‘king’s-evil’ with thy touch ;  
But thou wilt yet a kinglier mastery try,  
To cure the ‘poet’s-evil,’ poverty.”

In March of the following year, in response to—

“The humble petition of Poor Ben ;  
To the best of monarchs, masters, men,  
King Charles”

(“Underwoods,” xcv.), his annuity was raised from a hundred marks to a hundred pounds, with the voluntary addition by the king of a yearly tierce of Canary, Jonson’s favourite wine, from the royal cellars at Whitehall. From “Underwoods,” lxxiv., “To Master John Burges,” and lxxxvi., “To the Household,” 1630, we learn that both pension and wine were sometimes in arrear.

## V

The king's kindness did not stop here. In September, 1628, on the death of Middleton, the office of City's Chronologer had been conferred on Jonson, with a salary of one hundred nobles per annum. In November, 1631, this salary was suspended until he should have "presented some fruits of his labours in that his place." But in September, 1634, there is an entry in the City Records: "This day Mr. Recorder and Sir James Hamersley Knight and Alderman declared unto this Court His Majesty's pleasure signified unto them by the right honble. the Earle of Dorsett for and in the behalfe of Benjamine Johnson the Cittyes Chronologer, Whereupon it is ordered by this Court that his yearely pencion of one hundred nobles out of the Chamber of London shall be continued and that Mr. Chamberlen shall satisfie and pay unto him his arrerages thereof." He, no doubt, as is remarked by Mr. Dyce, to whom we owe the extracts from the Records, continued to hold the office till his death, when he was succeeded in it by Francis Quarles, of the "Emblems." This, with any other succours, must have been most welcome. Already, in 1631, he had addressed to the Lord High Treasurer an "Epistle Mendicant" ("Underwoods," xc.), wherein he says:—

"Disease the enemy, and his engineers,  
Want, with the rest of his concealed compeers,  
Have cast a trench about me now five years.

The Muse not peeps out, one of hundred days :

But lies blocked up and straitened, narrowed in,  
Fixed to the bed and boards, unlike to win  
Health, or scarce breath, as she had never been ;

Unless some saving honour of the crown,  
Dare think it, to relieve, no less renown,  
A bed-rid wit, than a besieged town."

This places the commencement of his disease and want in 1626. The want would have been much less had he not been not only liberal but lavish, with table ever free and purse ever open to his friends. And he was himself a generous liver : "Wine he always considered as necessary—and perhaps it was so—to counteract the occasional influence of that morbid tendency to melancholy generated by a constitutional affection of the scurvy, which also rendered society desirable and in some measure indispensable to him." This sad "Mendicant Epistle" appears to have brought him help from various quarters, and especially from the munificent Earl of Newcastle, one short letter to whom may be quoted :

"MY NOBLEST LORD AND BEST PATRON,—I send no borrowing epistle to provoke your lordship, for I have neither fortune to repay, nor security to engage, that will be taken ; but I make a most humble petition to your lordship's bounty to succour my present necessities this good time [festival] of Easter, and it shall conclude all begging requests hereafter on the behalf of your truest beadsman and most thankful servant,

"B. J."

Though his maladies continually increased, he bravely struggled on, and in 1632 a contemporary records :

"Ben Jonson, who I thought had been dead, has written a play against the next term, called the 'Magnetic Lady;'" which we learn was generally esteemed an excellent play. Howell wrote a characteristic letter to his "Father Ben" concerning it. Having quoted the "*Nullum fit magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae*," "There's no great wit without some mixture of madness," he goes on: "It is verified in you, for I find that you have been oftentimes mad: you were mad when you writ your 'Fox,' and madder when you writ your 'Alchemist;,' you were mad when you writ 'Catiline,' and stark mad when you writ 'Sejanus;,' but when you writ your 'Epigrams' and the 'Magnetic Lady' you were not so mad. . . . The madness I mean is that divine fury, that heating and heightening spirit which Ovid [Plato had been yet better] speaks of." Granting the truth of this, filial piety should have kept him from blurting it out to "Father Ben," considering his age and state and circumstances. In 1633 he produced his last comedy, "A Tale of a Tub:" a title which has been made his own by England's greatest satirist writing in his prime; who, turning over the leaves of the masterpiece in *his* far sadder decline, justly exclaimed, "My God! what a genius I had when I wrote this!" In the same year the king, going to Scotland to be crowned there, was magnificently entertained by the Earl of Newcastle at his seat at Welbeck, in Nottinghamshire; and in the following year, during a Royal "progress" into the north of England, yet more magnificently at another of his seats, Bolsover Castle, in Derbyshire; and Jonson on both occasions furnished little anti-

masques, each entitled, "Love's Welcome." The splendour of these entertainments may be estimated from what the Duchess records in the Life of her husband (he was afterwards Duke), that the first cost him between four and five thousand, and the second between fourteen and fifteen thousand pounds. Clarendon, in his "History of the Rebellion," recording this "stupendous entertainment," concludes: "which, God be thanked, though possibly it might too much whet the appetite of others to excess, no man ever after imitated." About this period Jonson writes to the Earl, in reference to we know not what work: "The faith of a fast friend with the duties of an humble servant, and the hearty prayers of a religious beadsman, all kindled upon this altar to your honour, my honourable lady, your hopeful issue, and your right noble brother, be ever my sacrifice!—It is the lewd printer's fault that I can send your lordship no more of my book. . . . My printer and I shall afford subject enough for a tragi-comedy; for with his delays and vexation I am almost become blind; and if heaven be so just, in the metamorphosis, to turn him into that creature which he most resembles, a dog, with a bell to lead me between Whitehall and my lodging, I may bid the world good night. And so I do." But one more play calls for notice, the "Sad Shepherd;" of which, unfortunately, only the first two acts and two scenes of the third have come down to us. Gifford says: "That it was completed I have little doubt: its mutilated state is easily accounted for by the confusion which followed the author's death. Into whose hands his papers fell, as he left apparently no will nor testamentary document

of any kind, cannot now be told : perhaps into those of the woman who resided with him as his nurse, or some of her kin ; but they were evidently careless or ignorant, and put his manuscripts together in a very disorderly manner, losing some and misplacing others. Had they handed down to us 'The Sad Shepherd' in its complete state, we should have possessed a poem which might have been confidently opposed to the proudest effort of dramatic genius that time has yet bequeathed us." It is a pastoral drama ; the scene in Sherwood Forest, Robin Hood and his band among the *dramatis personæ*. It is indeed very beautiful in parts, and one gladly welcomes such a sunset succeeding the overcast afternoon, as showing that the great light which had been clouded was by no means extinguished, that the genius of the brave old poet could still triumph ere it sank into the night of death ; but I can hardly concur in the measureless praise of Gifford, who was perhaps less qualified to judge a purely poetical drama than one abounding in keen observation, satirical humour, and masculine eloquence. I think the Prologue clearly proves that it *was* completed, and seems to fix the date at 1635-6, the latter the year before Jonson's death. The theatres were shut up this year ; otherwise the whole piece might have been preserved to us. That Jonson himself was proud of it is evident from the opening lines of this Prologue :—

“ He that hath feasted you these forty years,  
And fitted fables for your finer ears,  
Although at first he scarce could hit the bore ;  
Yet you, with patience harkening more and more,  
At length have grown up to him, and made known  
The working of his pen is now your own :

He prays you would vouchsafe, for your own sake,  
To hear him this once more, but sit awake.  
And though he now present you with such wool,  
As from mere English flocks his Muse can pull,  
He hopes when it is made up into cloth,  
Not the most curious head here will be loth  
To wear a hood of it, it being a fleece  
To match or those of Sicily or Greece."

These smooth-flowing lines are a further sample of the "jagged mis-shapen distiches" of my Lord Macaulay! The last, it need scarcely be said, alludes to the pastoral poems of Theocritus, Moschus, and Bion. It is pleasant to observe the friendly tone in which the poet addresses his audience, the grateful recognition of his well-earned popularity; though his self-esteem asserts itself in the characteristic interjections, "for your own sake," and "but sit awake."

It remains to speak of the Miscellaneous Poems and of the prose "Discoveries." The Epigrams, as will have been gathered from the quotations I have given, are seldom epigrams in our modern sense of the word: they are simply "short poems, chiefly restricted to one idea, and equally adapted to the delineation and expression of every passion incident to human life." They comprise eulogies, satires, epitaphs. I give two of the briefest, which are among the most epigrammatic as we now commonly understand the word:—

#### "ON THE UNION

"When was there contract better driven by Fate,  
Or celebrated with more truth of state?  
The world the temple was, the priest a king,  
The spoused pair two realms, the sea the ring."



## "ON COURT-WORM

" All men are worms, but this no man. In silk  
 'Twas brought to court first wrapt, and white as milk ;  
 Where afterwards it grew a butterfly,  
 Which was a caterpillar ; so 'twill die."

One of the panegyrics is so exquisite that I cannot refrain from citing it, though rather long : it is No. lxxvi., "On Lucy, Countess of Bedford" (to whom also lxxxiv. and xciv. are addressed), a lady worthy of the high praise—the patroness not only of Ben, but of Donne, Drayton, and Daniel, one of the best pieces of this last, a stately and truly noble one, being written in her honour. Here is Ben's :—

" This morning, timely rapt with holy fire,  
 I thought to form unto my zealous Muse,  
 What kind of creature I could most desire  
 To honour, serve, and love ; as Poets use.  
 I meant to make her fair, and free, and wise,  
 Of greatest blood, and yet more good than great ;  
 I meant the day-star should not brighter rise,  
 Nor lend like influence from his lucent seat.  
 I meant she should be courteous, facile, sweet,  
 Hating that solemn vice of greatness, pride ;  
 I meant each softest virtue there should meet,  
 Fit in that softer bosom to reside.  
 Only a learned and a manly soul  
 I purposed her ; that should with even powers  
 The rock, the spindle, and the sheers control  
 Of Destiny, and spin her own free hours.  
 Such when I meant to feign, and wished to see,  
 My Muse bade BEDFORD write, and that was she !"

I wonder whether to my Lord Macaulay these were jagged mis-shapen quatrains ! The other collections are entitled "The Forest" and "Underwoods." They comprise many eulogiums, and specially many

pieces in cordial praise of contemporary writers. There are also some beautiful songs too little known ; and it may be observed generally that Jonson's lyrics are strangely neglected, with the exception of three or four popular favourites, such as "Drink to me only with thine eyes," and that serene invocation of Hesperus in "Cynthia's Revels" (Act v. Sc. 3), "Queen and huntress, chaste and fair." But the most remarkable of the shorter poems are the epitaphs and elegies, of which the finest are, I believe, the finest in the language. I will not speak here of the magnanimous and fervent tribute to the memory of Shakespeare ; and I merely mention the epitaphs on his own first daughter and first son, on Margaret Ratcliffe (the only acrostic I remember in his works), on Vincent Corbet, Philip Gray ; and the elegies on Lady Jane Pawlet, and on Lady Venetia Digby, whom he termed his Muse, and to whom the epigram, "Underwoods," xcvi., is addressed, being in praise of her husband, the celebrated Sir Kenelm Digby. But there are three which I am loth to omit, though two of them are generally known. The first is on Salathiel Pavy (Epigram 120), one of the boys of the Queen's Chapel, who performed in his "Cynthia's Revels" and "Poetaster," and of whom he was very fond :—

" Weep with me, all you that read  
 This little story :  
 And know, for whom a tear you shed  
 Death's self is sorry.  
 'Twas a child that so did thrive  
 In grace and feature,  
 As Heaven and Nature seemed to strive  
 Which owned the creature.

Years he numbered scarce thirteen,  
 When Fates turned cruel,  
 Yet three filled zodiacs had he been  
 The stage's jewel ;  
 And did act, what now we moan,  
 Old men so duly,  
 As, sooth, the Parcæ thought him one,  
 He played so truly.  
 So, by error, to his fate  
 They all consented ;  
 But, viewing him since, alas, too late !  
 They have repented ;  
 And have sought, to give new birth,  
 In baths to steep him  
 But, being so much too good for earth,  
 Heaven vows to keep him."

The second (Epigram 124) is on Elizabeth L. H., a lady, I believe, still unidentified :—

" Wouldst thou hear what man can say  
 In a little? reader, stay.

Underneath this stone doth lie  
 As much beauty as could die :  
 Which in life did harbour give  
 To more virtue than doth live.

If at all she had a fault,  
 Leave it buried in this vault.  
 One name was ELIZABETH,  
 The other let it sleep with death :  
 Fitter, where it died, to tell,  
 Than that it lived at all. Farewell ! "

It will be remembered that Mrs. Barrett Browning has a beautiful little poem, "A Portrait," bearing for motto the line, "One name was Elizabeth;" a line applicable to the poetess herself, to whose other

names, both of maidenhood and marriage, it will be long ere the next can be applied.

The third ("Underwoods," xv.), perfect and unequalled, unless by the second section of the above, is on the Countess of Pembroke :—

"Underneath this sable herse  
Lies the subject of all verse,  
Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother ;  
Death ! ere thou hast slain another,  
Learn'd and fair and good as she,  
Time shall throw a dart at thee."

"Timber ; or, Discoveries made upon Men and Matter. As they have flowed out of his Daily Readings, or had their reflux to his peculiar Notion of the Times." Under this somewhat quaint title we have some of "the last drops of Jonson's quill," in a collection of notes, moral and critical, showing how great must have been the loss when fire destroyed those accumulated during twice twelve years, when his powers were in full vigour. Gifford more than once expresses his opinion that Jonson's prose was the best of the time. This is a rather hazardous judgment, considering that among his contemporaries were Lord Bacon, Jeremy Taylor, Sir Thomas Browne, Sir Walter Raleigh, together with such less ornate writers as Selden and Donne, not to speak of those who made the Authorised Version of the Bible. Without exalting Ben's prose to this perilous elevation, we can recognise that it is truly admirable—terse, unaffected, perspicuous, sincere, weighty with knowledge and thought ; and so little out of date that it might have been written yesterday. In reading the moral reflections in these "Discoveries," one may often

fancy himself occupied with Bacon's "Essays," until he misses the copiousness of illustration. Here are one or two of the shortest: "Consilia:" "No man is so foolish but may give another good counsel sometimes; and no man is so wise but may easily err if he will take no other's counsel than his own. But very few men are wise by their own counsel; or learned by their own teaching. For he that was only taught by himself had a fool to his master." "Applausus:" "We praise the things we hear with much more willingness than those we see, because we envy the present and reverence the past, thinking ourselves instructed by the one and overlaid by the other." "Comit. Suffragia:" "Suffrages in Parliament are numbered, not weighed: nor can it be otherwise in those public councils, where nothing is so unequal as the equality; for there, how odd soever men's brains or wisdoms are, their power is always even and the same." Under the head of *Memoria*, he tells us: "I myself could, in my youth, have repeated all that ever I had made, and so continued till I was past forty; since, it is much decayed in me. Yet I can repeat whole books that I have read, and poems of some selected friends, which I have liked to charge my memory with." Of Shakespeare, *De Shakespeare Nostrat*: "I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penned) he never blotted out a line. My answer hath been, Would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance, who choose that circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted, and to justify mine own

candour ; for I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was (indeed) honest, and of an open and free nature ; had an excellent phantsie, brave notions, and gentle expressions ; wherein he flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped. His wit was in his own power ; would the rule of it had been so too." On the birthday of Lord Bacon, 22nd January, 1621, when newly made Lord Chancellor, and at the height of his prosperity, Jonson had written beautifully ("Underwoods," lxx.) :—

"England's high Chancellor : the destined heir,  
In his soft cradle, to his father's chair :  
Whose even threads the Fates spin round and full,  
Out of their choicest and their whitest wool."

It was not long, as we are all aware, before wool anything but white came into that spinning ; but Jonson, in his own old age, and after Bacon's death (who died ten years before him), writes thus nobly to the honour of both : "My conceit of his Person was never increased towards him by his place or honours ; but I have and do reverence him for the greatness which was only proper to himself, in that he seemed to me ever, by his work, one of the greatest men, and most worthy of admiration, that had been in many Ages. In his adversity I ever prayed that God would give him strength ; for Greatness he could not want. Neither could I condole in a word or syllable for him, as knowing no accident could do harm to virtue, but rather help to make it manifest." And really, when one considers, it appears possible that Jonson knew Bacon quite as well as did Pope or even the omnis-

cient Macaulay. Again, of his oratory: "Yet there happened in my time one noble Speaker, who was full of gravity in his speaking. His language (where he could spare or pass by a jest) was nobly censorious. No man ever spake more neatly, more pressly, more weightily, or suffered less emptiness, less idleness in what he uttered. No member of his speech but consisted of his own graces. His hearers could not cough, or look aside from him without loss. He commanded where he spoke, and had his judges angry and pleased at his devotion. No man had their affections more in his power. The fear of every man that heard him was lest he should make an end." And finally, after naming Lord Chancellor Egerton: "But his learned and able (though unfortunate) successor is he who hath filled up all numbers, and performed that in our tongue which may be compared or preferred either to insolent Greece or haughty Rome. In short, within his view, and about his times, were all the wits born that could honour a language or help study. Now things daily fall, wits grow downward, and eloquence grows backward: so that he may be named and stand as the mark and acme of our language."

## VI

Jonson died in his sixty-fifth year, in August, 1637; according to Gifford, on the 6th, the funeral being on the 9th. But Col. Cunningham cites from "Notes and Queries" the following record, by Sir Edward Walker, Garter: "Thursday, 17 August. Died at Westminster, Mr. Benjamin Johnson, the most famous

accurate, and learned poet of our age, especially in the English tongue, having left behind him many rare pieces, which have sufficiently demonstrated to the world his worth. He was buried the next day following, being accompanied to his grave with all or the greatest part of the nobility and gentry then in the town.

The different dates for the death *may* arise from the one being Old Style and the other New (although the New was not legally established in England until more than a century later, 1752), but those of the funeral cannot be thus reconciled. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, "in the north aisle, in the path of square stone opposite to the scutcheon of Robertus de Ros." His friends and admirers projected a noble monument to his memory, to be raised by subscription, and in the meantime his remains were covered with the pavement stone which had been removed for the interment. Aubrey relates that Sir John Young, chancing to pass through the abbey, and not enduring that the remains of so great a man should lie at all without a memorial, gave one of the workmen eighteenpence to cut the famous inscription, "O rare Ben Jonson!" An ample sum was raised for the monument, but its erection was hindered by the political and religious agitations resulting in the great Civil War, and the money was returned to the subscribers. He left no family. His wife appears to have died some time before his journey into Scotland. If he married again, nothing is known, I believe, of the second wife and marriage save what is recorded in the following entry, which probably, but not quite certainly, relates to him, extracted by Mr. Collier from the register of St. Giles, Cripplegate: "Married



Ben Jonson and Hester Hopkins, 27th July, 1623." He would be then just past fifty.

A monument of another kind was achieved to him in the "*Jonsonus Virbius* ; or, the Memory of Ben Jonson. Revived by the Friends of the Muses ;" being a collection of elegies in English and Latin, with one in Greek, published about six months after his death, under the care of Duppa, Bishop of Winchester and tutor to the Prince of Wales, and reprinted by Gifford at the end of the "Works." In the list of contributors are some of the best known names of the period (we must bear in mind that most of the supremely great men whom we are wont to think of as Jonson's contemporaries, the "Elizabethans" and their juniors associated with his prime, died before him), including Lord Falkland, who is said to have given the title, *Jonsonus Virbius* ; Sir John Beaumont, son of the author of "Bosworth Field," and nephew of the dramatist ; the good Henry King, afterwards Bishop of Chichester, a genuine, though a minor poet ; Thomas May, translator of Lucan, and historian of the Parliament ; William Habington, Edmund Waller, John Cleveland, Jasper Mayne, William Cartwright, Owen Feltham of the "Resolves," James Howell of the "Familiar Epistles," Shackerley Marmion, Ralph Brideoake (Bishop of Chichester after King), and John Ford the dramatist. I have already quoted some lines from Falkland's "Eglogue;" but a few more may here be given :—

"Alas ! that bard, that glorious bard is dead,  
Who, when I whilom cities visited,  
Hath made them seem but hours which were full days,  
Whilst he vouchsafed me his harmonious lays.

JONSON you mean, unless I much do err,  
I know the person by the character.

Her great instructor gone, I know the age  
No less laments than doth the widowed stage,  
And only vice and folly now are glad ;  
Our gods are troubled, and our prince is sad.

How he, when he could know it, reaped his fame,  
And long outlived the envy of his name :  
To him how daily flocked, what reverence gave,  
All that had wit, or would be thought to have,  
Or hope to gain, and in so large a store,  
That to his ashes they can pay no more,  
Except those few who censuring, thought not so,  
But aimed at glory from so great a foe :  
How the wise too, did with mere wits agree,  
As Pembroke, Portland, and grave Aubigny ;  
Nor thought the rigidest senator a shame,  
To contribute to so deserved a name."

Lord Clarendon, in the "History of his own Life," says of Falkland, whose name always suffuses his style with a cordial glow : "He had naturally such a generosity and bounty in him that he seemed to have his estate in trust for all worthy persons who stood in want of supplies and encouragement, as Ben Jonson and others of that time, whose fortunes required, and whose spirits made them superior to ordinary obligations." There is a letter from Ben to the Earl of Newcastle, dated 4th February, 1632 : "I have here obeyed your commands, and sent you a packet of my own praises, which I should not have done if I had any stock of modesty in store ; but 'obedience is better than sacrifice,' and you command it. I am now like an old bankrupt in wit that am driven to pay debts on my friends' credit ; and, for want of

satisfying letters, to subscribe bills of exchange." This letter enclosed several poems, among which were two from Falkland, then Sir Lucius Cary; the first being, "An Anniversary Epistle on Sir Henry Morison, with an Apostrophe to my father Jonson," and the other, an "Epistle to his noble father Ben." Falkland, in the letter accompanying, speaks most modestly of his verses: "What is ill in them (which I fear is all) belongs only to myself; if there be anything tolerable, it is somewhat you dropt negligently one day at The Dog, and I took it up." Morison died young in 1629 or 1630, just before Cary, then twenty, married his sister Letitia, of whom Clarendon says: "She was a lady of a most extraordinary wit and judgment, and of the most signal virtue and exemplary life that the age produced, and who brought him many hopeful children in which he took great delight." "Underwoods," lxxxviii., as termed, "A Pindaric Ode to the Immortal Memory and Friendship of that Noble Pair, Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison," being written on the early death of the latter. Here is the second antistrophe:—

"Alas! but MORISON fell young:  
 He never fell,—thou fall'st, my tongue.  
 He stood a soldier to the last right end,  
 A perfect patriot, and a noble friend;  
     But most a virtuous son.  
     All offices were done  
 By him so ample, full, and round,  
 In weight, in measure, number, sound,  
 As, though his age imperfect might appear,  
 His life was of humanity the sphere."

The third strophe has been often quoted:—

“It is not growing like a tree  
In bulk, doth make man better be ;  
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,  
To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sear :  
A lily of a day,  
Is fairer far, in May,  
Although it fall and die that night ;  
It was the plant and flower of light.  
In small proportions we just beauties see ;  
And in short measures life may perfect be.”

Whence the antistrophe swells triumphant over grief :—

“Call, noble LUCIUS, then for wine,  
And let thy looks with gladness shine :  
Accept this Garland, place it on thy head,  
And think, nay know, thy MORISON’S not dead.  
He leaped the present age,  
Possest with holy rage,  
To see that bright eternal day ;  
Of which we priests and poets say  
Such truths as we expect for happy men.”

Many features of Ben’s character have been incidentally illustrated in the course of these articles, but now some special attention must be given to it. Let us commence with Drummond’s sketch in exceedingly black chalk, “the portrait composed almost entirely of shadows,” already referred to (p. 112), and try whether we can work up from this something like an accurate likeness.

“He is a great lover and praiser of himself ; a contemner and scorner of others ; given rather to lose a friend than a jest ; jealous of every word and action of those about him (especiallie after drink, which is one of the elements in which he liveth) ; a dissembler

of ill parts which raigne in him, a bragger of some good that he wanteth; thinketh nothing well bot what either he himself or some of his friends and countrymen hath said or done; he is passionately kynde and angry; carelesse either to give or keep; vindicative, but, if he be well answered, at himself.

"For any religion, as being versed in both. Interpreteth best sayings and deeds often to the worst. Oppressed with fantasie, which hath over-mastered his reason, a generall disease in many Poets. His inventions are smooth and easie; but above all he excelleth in a Translation."

This is indeed a bright testimonial from "your loving friend, W. D.," who had written two days before, "there is nothing I wish more than to be in the calendar of those who love you!" "Save me from my friends!" said the wise Italian; "against my enemies I can guard myself." Let us consider this magnanimous eulogium somewhat in detail: "He is a great lover and praiser of himself." That Jonson, like every other man, loved and praised himself (such as make show of most humility praising themselves most intolerably), I do not deny; but that he was a *great* lover and praiser of himself, exceeding common men in these respects, I find no proof. True, he had a full share of self-esteem, to which he frankly gave voice when occasion demanded; but this self-esteem was firmly based on solid merits. High-minded, brave, sincere, never writing from unworthy motives, or with intentions other than honourable, planning with patient care, and working out with conscientious thoroughness; aware, as he could not but be aware, that in classical learning, and in the sober

taste and judgment which such learning nourishes, he was almost if not quite unequalled. He would neither bow nor pretend to bow to vulgar censures of what he knew to be above the vulgar comprehension; neither consent nor affect to consent to be mixed up with the lower class of playwrights, unlearned and unskilful, producing in hottest haste, pandering to the mob, often scurrilous, profane, and obscene.

“A contemner and scorner of others; given rather to lose a friend than a jest; jealous of every word and action of those about him (especially after drink, which is one of the elements in which he liveth).” Everything we know of Jonson, bearing upon these charges, tends to falsify them. Gifford says, and says well: “It cannot be too often repeated that this writer, who has been described as a mere mass of spleen and ill-nature, was, in fact, the frankest and most liberal of mankind. I am fully warranted in saying that more valuable books given to individuals by Jonson are yet to be met with than by any [other] person of that age. Scores of them have fallen under my own inspection, and I have heard of abundance of others.” And in a note he cites confirmation from the elder Disraeli (“Quarrels of Authors”): “No [other] has left behind him in MS. so many testimonies of personal fondness as Ben Jonson, by inscriptions and addresses, in the copies of his works, which he presented to his friends. Of these I have seen more than one fervent and impressive.” And William Godwin (in “Appendix to the Lives of E. and J. Philips;” where, by the way, he points out in some detail how largely Milton was indebted to

Jonson): "That he was envious, and sparing in commendation to his contemporaries, may as well immediately be denied. His commendatory verses on Shakespeare, Drayton, Donne, Fletcher, Sir John Beaumont, and others [many others] may easily be consulted; and he that finds in them any penury of praise, any malicious ambiguity or concealed detraction, may safely be affirmed to have brought a mind already poisoned to their perusal." Indeed, it is scarcely too much to assert that in his poems we find generous and hearty while discriminating eulogy of all the most justly eminent persons of his time, and especially of those eminent in literature and in his own department of literature, as well as most kindly and encouraging praise of many writers of a lower degree. And how cordial were his relations with the worthiest of his literary brethren may be seen, not only from his commendations of them, but from their commendations of him. Besides those named as contributing to the *Jonsonus Virbius* we have commendatory verses, either on particular dramas or on his works in general, from George Chapman, Donne, Francis Beaumont, Fletcher, Selden (in Latin), and Selden's "most beloved Friend and Chamberfellow" Edward Heyward, to whom the "Titles of Honour" was dedicated, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Oldham, Herrick, Shirley, and others. Shirley having, as Gifford notes, been singled out with exquisite propriety, by Steevens and others, as the most scurrilous of Jonson's enemies, it may be well to give some lines from his prologue to the "Alchemist," written for a performance of it after Jonson's death :—

“ ‘The Alchemist,’ a play for strength of wit,  
 And true art, made to shame what hath been writ  
 In former ages ; I except no worth  
 Of what or Greeks or Latins have brought forth ;  
 Is now to be presented to your ear,  
 For which I would each man were a Muse here  
 To know, and in his soul be fit to be  
 Judge of this master-piece of comedy ;

Which, though some men that never reached him may  
 Decry, that love all folly in a play ;

THE WISER FEW SHALL THIS DISTINCTION HAVE,  
 TO KNEEL, NOT TREAD, UPON HIS HONOURED GRAVE.”

Strange scurrile enmity this !—as strange, in its kind,  
 as the loving friendliness of “your loving friend,  
 W. D.”

## VII

Two striking proofs of Ben’s magnanimous generosity must be noted : he fostered all possible rivals in the young and promising talents, who were proud to call him father, and whom he adopted as his literary sons ; he praised all actual rivals in direct proportion to their merits, the most fervid praise to the most formidable rivals, the very men whom, had he really been jealous and envious, he would have most striven to depreciate. One capital and crucial instance suffices on this point, the instance of Him who easily outrivalled all competitors, but who in his own and the next two or three ages was scarcely, in popular estimation, ranked above Jonson or Beaumont and Fletcher. How did Jonson speak of Shakespeare ? His verdict in prose I gave in a previous number ; his verdict in poetry we have in



the two pieces, "Underwoods," xi. and xii., "On the Portrait of Shakespeare," prefixed to the first folio edition, 1623, and, "To the Memory of my beloved Master William Shakespeare, and What He hath Left Us." Would that we had space here to give this latter at full length, for it is so honourable to both that it can hardly be too often reprinted. I ask where, even now, when the supremacy has long been unchallenged, which was then challenged freely, and by many as wise in their great generation as the wisest in ours, which is so much smaller—where even now shall we find a tribute to that supremacy more ample, more magnificent, or rendered with more loyal free will?—

"To draw no envy, SHAKESPEARE, on thy name,  
Am I thus ample to thy book and fame;  
While I confess thy writings to be such,  
As neither Man nor Muse can praise too much.  
'Tis true, and all men's suffrage.

Soul of the age!

The applause! delight! the wonder of our stage!  
My SHAKESPEARE rise! I will not lodge thee by  
Chaucer, or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lie  
A little further to make thee a room:\*

\* Alluding, as Whalley noted, to an elegy on Shakespeare by W. Basse, which opens thus:—

"Renowned Spenser, lie a thought more nigh  
To learned Chaucer; and, rare Beaumont, lie  
A little nearer Spenser, to make room  
For Shakespeare in your threefold, fourfold tomb.  
To lodge all four in one bed make a shift,  
For until doomsday hardly will a fifth,  
Betwixt this day and that, by fates be slain,  
For whom your curtains need be drawn again.

Thou art a monument without a tomb,  
 And art alive still while thy book doth live  
 And we have wits to read and praise to give.

—to hear thy buskin tread

And shake a stage ; or when thy socks were on,  
 Leave thee alone for the comparison  
 Of all that insolent Greece or haughty Rome  
 Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.  
 Triumph, my Briton, thou hast one to show,  
 To whom all Scenes of Europe homage owe.  
 He was not of an age, but for all time !  
 And all the Muses still were in their prime,  
 When, like Apollo, he came forth to warm  
 Our ears, or like a Mercury to charm !  
 Nature herself was proud of his designs,  
 And joyed to wear the dressing of his lines !  
 Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,  
 As, since, she will vouchsafe no other wit.

Yet must I not give Nature all ; thy Art,  
 My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.

For a good poet's made, as well as born.  
 And such wert thou ! Look how the father's face  
 Lives in his issue, even so the race  
 Of Shakespeare's mind and manners brightly shines  
 In his well tornèd and true filèd lines :  
 In each of which he seems to shake a lance,  
 As brandisht at the eyes of ignorance.\*  
 Sweet Swan of Avon ! what a sight it were  
 To see thee in our waters yet appear,  
 And make those flights upon the banks of Thames,  
 That so did take Eliza and our James !  
 But stay, I see thee in the hemisphere  
 Advanced, and made a constellation there !  
 Shine forth, thou Star of Poets."

\* Of course, a punning allusion to his name ; but a right noble one. So Wordsworth, in his *Elegy on Lamb*, dwelt with unusual tenderness on the aptness of his name.

It has been justly remarked by Gifford that the two most endearing appellations of our greatest poet, "Gentle Shakespeare" and "Sweet Swan of Avon," are due to that very rival whom the Shakespearian commentators of the last century persistently accused of envying and maligning him. It may also be observed, as a proof of Jonson's sound judgment, that the two men whom he, with all his profound classical knowledge and sympathies, put forward as our champions, in prose and verse respectively, against the mightiest of "insolent Greece or haughty Rome" (he uses the identical terms in both cases) were Bacon and Shakespeare.

We now come to the parenthetical charge, that "drink is one of the elements in which he liveth." That Ben in his forty-seventh year, robust in body and mind, and in full enjoyment of a long holiday, drank enough to astound and terrify Drummond, may be freely admitted ; but was the jolly guest a sot because the host was a prim valetudinarian ? They were an ill-assorted couple, and the strong man, as usual, was not aware how he overbore the weak ; and the weak man, also as usual, pretended to enjoy it, and took a covert revenge. If, in place of the Laird of Hawthornden, the recording host had been such an one as the Ettrick Shepherd celebrates, we should have had something like a true, because sympathetic, character of Westminster's first Big Ben :—

"Canty war ye o'er your kale,  
Toddy jugs, an' caups o' ale ;  
Heart aye kind, an' leal, an' hale,—  
Honest Laird o' Lamington !

. . . . .

I like a man to tak' his glass,  
Toast a friend or bonnie lass;  
He that winna is an ass—  
Deil send him ane to gallop on !

I like a man that's frank an' kind,  
Meets me when I have a mind,  
Sings his sang an' drinks me blind,  
Like the Laird o' Lamington."

*He* would just have suited our poet, who "of all styles loved most to be named Honest, and hath of that one hundreth letters so naming him." Did Drummond, think you, have many so naming *him* ?

In our days the question of stimulants is commonly discussed with so much canting intemperance on the one side (that called, in irony, the Temperance) and so much timid hypocrisy on the other, that we rarely hear or read a straightforward sensible word on it. About the best I have ever seen, in a short space, is that of Dr. Garth Wilkinson, in his magistral but little known work, "The Human Body and its Connexion with Man," chap. iii., "Assimilation and its Organs;" much of the argument being as good for the sedative tobacco as for the stimulant wine. The wise liberal rule in this matter is precisely the contrary of that in politics: it is men not measures, instead of measures not men. The pertinent question is not, How much does So-and-So drink? but, How does he live and work on his drink, and into what society does it lead him? It is scarcely needful to state that Jonson emerges triumphant from such a test. As Gifford says on this point: "The immensity of his literary acquisitions, and the number and extent of his productions, refute the slander, no less

than the gravity, dignity, wisdom, and piety of those with whom he passed his life from manhood to extreme old age." Clarendon, in his *Life*, speaking of himself in the third person, says: "He owed all the little he knew, and the little good that was in him, to the friendships and conversation he had still been used to, of the most excellent men in their several kinds that lived in that age; by whose learning and information and instruction he formed his studies, and mended his understanding, and by whose gentleness and sweetness of behaviour, and justice and virtue and example, he formed his manners. . . . Whilst he was only a student of the law, and stood at gaze, and irresolute what corner of life to take, his chief acquaintances were Ben Jonson, John Selden, Charles Cotton, John Vaughan, Sir Kenelm Digby, Thomas May, and Thomas Carew, and some others of eminent faculties in their several ways. Ben Jonson's name can never be forgotten, having by his very good learning, and the severity of his nature and manners, very much reformed the stage, and indeed the English poetry itself. . . . His [Jonson's] conversation was very good, and with the men of most note." One of the first scholars and most laborious writers of the age, conspicuous in the second rank of our poets and the front rank of our dramatists, he was on terms of familiar friendship with the noblest of his contemporaries; the boon-companions of his prime were the men of the Mermaid, and of his age his sons at the Apollo. He was convivial, and, as his burly namesake put it, "a clubbable man;" and in his days, taverns were the regular social resorts of the most illustrious men, as coffee-houses in the

next century, and as no places at all in ours—for our clubs have expanded far beyond the bounds of sociability. Frank and fearless, he rather exaggerated than sought to hide his jovial tastes ; and the younger men, who exulted in being of his society, did so too. But we know that there was a serious side to his character which he could assert on occasion, as in the apologetical Dialogue to the “Poetaster,” already quoted from :—

“ I, that spend half my nights, and all my days,  
Here in a cell, to get a dark pale face,  
To come forth worth the ivy or the bays,  
And in this age can hope no other grace.”

Garth Wilkinson says : “ It is at banquets like Plato’s that wine is vindicated. Their guests show the scope of human assimilation. . . . The spirit of playmates with the spirit of wine ; the pleasant emotions and the brilliant saws and dreams of society, like wine-lilies naturally rock upon the cup, and dip their spirity roots into the beakers. The imaginative skies are vinous then ; Valhalla has its mead, and great Odin never eats, but all sustenance is liquor to All-father, who drinks only wine. Elysium, too, would be a poor Elysium without nectar and ambrosia.” Try to Fancy an Elysium full of Anti-Tobacco Tee-totalers ! Who that is sane would not prefer Tartarus ? Now, the banquets at which rare Ben revelled *were* like Plato’s, and their wine was fully vindicated by the genial genius and wit that flowed more freely than its freest flowing. Hackneyed as they are, I could not but give Beaumont’s verses on the Mermaid, and, though they are equally hackneyed, I must give those of Herrick on other taverns :—

"Ah BEN!  
 Say how, or when,  
 Shall we thy guests  
 Meet at those lyric feasts  
 Made at the Sun,  
 The Dog, the Triple Tun?  
 Where we such clusters had  
 As made us nobly wild, not mad;  
 And yet each verse of thine  
 Outdid the meat, outdid the frolic wine.

My BEN!  
 Or come agen;  
 Or send to us  
 Thy wit's great over-plus:  
 But teach us yet  
 Wisely to husband it;  
 Lest we that talent spend:  
 And having once brought to an end  
 That precious stock; the store  
 Of such a wit: the world should have no more."

In Epigram 120, "Inviting a Friend to Supper," Jonson enumerates with rich relish the good things this "grave sir" may look for, but interjects—

"Howsoe'er, my man,\*  
 Shall read a piece of Virgil, Tacitus,  
 Livy, or of some better book, to us,  
 Of which we'll speak our minds, amidst our meat,  
 And I'll profess no verses to repeat."

In "Underwoods," lxvi., "An Epistle, answering to one that asked to be sealed of the Tribe of Ben," he specifies among those with whom he will have no fellowship:—

\* Richard Brome, whom he educated. "Underwoods," xxviii., is addressed "To my faithful servant and (by his continued virtue) my loving friend," Richard Brome, on his comedy of the "Northern Lass," which, Jonson says, has justly gained good applause from the stage.

“those that merely talk, and never think,  
That live in the wild Anarchy of Drink,  
Subject to quarrel only.”

And in his *Leges Convivales* for the famous Apollo Club, founded by him, we see what sound ideas he had of good fellowship. This club met in the Apollo Room of the Old Devil Tavern, close to the east of Temple Bar, bought by Messrs. Child, the bankers, in 1787, and soon afterwards pulled down by them for the erection of a new building for their business. The *Laws*, it is said, were engraved on black marble. Over the door of the room was a bust of our poet, beneath which, in gold letters, on a black ground, were the following lines from his pen:—

“ ‘Welcome all who lead or follow,  
To the Oracle of APOLLO—  
Here he speaks out of his pottle,  
Or the tripos, his tower bottle :  
All his answers are divine,  
Truth itself doth flow in wine.  
Hang up all the poor hop-drinkers,  
Cries old Sim, the king of skinkers ;  
He the half of life abuses,  
That sits watering with the Muses.  
Those dull girls no good can mean us ;  
Wine it is the milk of Venus,  
And the poet’s horse accounted ;  
Ply it, and you all are mounted.  
’Tis the pure Phœbian liquor,  
Cheers the brains, makes wit the quicker,  
Pays all debts, cures all diseases,  
And at once three senses pleases.  
Welcome all who lead or follow,  
To the Oracle of APOLLO.’  
O RARE BEN JONSON !”

These verses, with all their humorous exaggeration



of the Rabelaisian revelry, testify to a certain vigour of constitution (conspicuous in the bill of fare of Epigram 101, already mentioned), and make us envy the generations who scarcely knew that they had nerves. As Wilkinson says again : "The hospitalities of other times enabled the guests to digest hard things, for which their successors have no stomachs : courage and clanship and bold ambition haunted the boars' heads and smoking beeves, and horns of mead and of wine. The revellers were firmer in friendship, brighter in honour, softer in love, and stronger in battle, for the spirits which descended upon the hall."

The other charges need not be discussed at length, being partly disposed of in what has been said already. We admit that Ben was passionately kind and angry ; but know that such a character is rarely, if ever, vindictive, and find no trace of vindictiveness in his life or works. Although by no means strait-laced, he seems to have been sincerely religious, and warmly attached to the Church of England, to which he was re-converted by patient study and reflection. His few devotional pieces are very earnest and solemn, and darkened with hypochondria such as lowered on his namesake of the next century. I know nothing to make us doubt that right through his life he was governed by the principles announced in the passage cited from the dedication to "Volpone" (p. 100) : "For my particular, I can, and from a most clear conscience, affirm that I have ever trembled to think toward the least profaneness ; have loathed the use of such foul and unwashed bawdry as is now made the food of the scene." Abhorrence of the

"ribaldry, profanation, blasphemy," then too common on the stage, could not be more forcibly expressed than in his indignant denial "that all are embarked in this bold adventure for hell."

Drummond's literary verdict appears as untrustworthy as his moral. "Oppressed with fantasie, which hath ever mastered his reason, a generall disease in many Poets!" A general disease in poets, perhaps, but Jonson was precisely the last poet to be infected with it. As Clarendon justly remarks, in the passage quoted from already, "his natural advantages were judgment to order and govern fancy, rather than excess of fancy; his productions being slow and upon deliberation, yet then abounding with great wit and fancy, and will live accordingly." He went to the other extreme, his reason or judgment was generally too predominant over his fantasy or imagination; whence that intellectual coldness and hardness, detracting from his popularity in our soft-headed, sentimental age.

### VIII

Having sketched the life of Rare Ben and spoken generally of his works, it remains to speak of them particularly in connection with the subject wherein the *Tobacco Plant* is most profoundly interested. Books have been regarded, studied, and judged in many relations, as, taking a few instances at random, to history, or the art of making fiction appear solid fact; metaphysics, or the art of "erring with method;" morality, or the art of expanding local habits into

universal rules; logic, or the art of transforming words into things; theology, or the art of dogmatizing on matters whereof nobody can know anything whatever; rhetoric, or the art of saying nothings gracefully; politics, or the art of embroiling embroilment; science, or the art of rendering a grain of knowledge more conspicuous than a desert of neuroscience. But if to these and the like trivial matters, why not to the most important and transcendent of all? Wherefore I proceed to consider the works of our poet in relation to sublime and divine tobacco—a thrilling theme! It has been often remarked that the introduction of the weed (so we lovingly vilipend the sweetest and dearest of flowers) was synchronous with the wonderful outburst of genius irradiating the close of the sixteenth and opening of the seventeenth century; whence it has been plausibly urged that the latter was in large measure due to the former, that those fires of unequalled fervour and splendour were kindled at the altar of Diva Nicotina. Against this theory it has been contended by the profane, that if tobacco at the very beginning wrought such marvellous effects, we ought to be by this time, through continual and ever-increasing inspiration of pipe and cigar (for truly to in-spiration these are ever devoted), a people half-composed of Raleighs, and Bacons, and Shakespeares; but the objection shows a lack of historical insight, due, it may be, to a lack of historical knowledge. The world is a perpetual flux; the centuries are differently dominated; the heavenly dynasties change even as the dynasties of earth; the god must have successive avatars, nor can he continue in one form, even though it be the most beautiful.

Was not the Golden Age the best?—yet it had to give way to the Silver, and this again to the Iron (if the poets will graciously permit); and are we not now in the age of Brass? Even so the Elizabethans represent an age of Tobacco, the Queen Anne's men an age of Coffee, the late George III.'s men an age of Revolutions, the Victorians an age of Cant. And as among the brazen multitudes we have still a few men of iron, of silver, and even of gold; so among the canting multitudes we have still some men of revolution, of coffee, and even a few men of genius inspired by tobacco.

It has, too, been often remarked that Shakespeare never mentions or alludes to tobacco, though he may have smoked many a good pipe with Raleigh himself at the "Mermaid." It is to be feared that the remark is deplorably well founded. I myself have carefully scrutinised his works, in the hope of discovering some indication of his knowledge of its existence and use, but have not been able to find a single one that I can consider certain. Of course there are passages which a fumous special pleader might press into the service, but I scorn the wresting and racking of texts. Neither in *Othello*, nor *Macbeth*, nor *Lear*; neither in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Julius Cæsar*, nor even in *Coriolanus*, can the candid investigator light upon traces of the common custom of smoking. It is not recorded that Hamlet ever took a pipe to soothe his melancholy, or that *Timon of Athens* offered cigars of a superior brand at his else sumptuous entertainments. In *Troilus and Cressida* we have Achilles and Ajax always fuming without the aid of even a cigarette. Many of the

characters are continually taking snuff, but this does not appear to have been supplied by the tobacconist. The pipes are simply pastoral, and none of the weeds is *THE WEED*. Let the antis<sup>1</sup> exult and triumph over us: neither in Shakespeare nor in the Bible is there sanction for such burning of incense as ours.

It may be pleaded that Shakespeare places all his dramas in times anterior to his own; that he scarcely ever touches on contemporary matters, save to flatter, courtier-like, his queen and king, or kick at a puppet-show stealing away his audiences (as if people had not a perfect right to go to see marionettes rather than *Hamlet*, if so their tastes led them!): we accept these apologies in palliation, we cannot in full vindication. Let us frankly admit that the greatest and most universal writers have their faults—of commission, and yet more of omission. Has not Swift pointed out, among other defects ("Tale of a Tub," sect. v.), that Homer himself "seems to have read but very superficially either Sendivogius, Behmen, or Anthroposophia Theomagica?" And the weeping critic continues: "Having read his writings with the utmost application usual among modern wits, I could never yet discover the least direction about the structure of that useful instrument, a save-all; for want of which, if the moderns had not lent their assistance, we might yet have wandered in the dark." And then, saddest of all: "But I have still behind a fault far more notorious to tax this author with; I mean his gross ignorance in the common laws of this realm, and in the doctrine as well as discipline of the Church of England." And these heavy charges equally apply

\* *i.e.*, anti-tobacco fanatics.

to Plato and Aristotle and the other wise men of antiquity. Homer nods, and forgets the save-all; Shakespeare also nods, say over a pipe, and forgets the very pipe over which he is nodding.

And here I may observe, with profound regret, that it is not only in literature that the greatest men are thus fallible. To take but one capital instance, it has been argued that Socrates himself was but a lazy old loafer who went bumming around at Athens, gossiping about anything and everything with anybody he could get to gossip with him, and pretending that this desultory chit-chat was philosophy; picking up loose young swells like Alcibiades, and sponging on them for dinners, after which he was quite ready to stay drinking all night, as we read in the "Banquet." As to his guardian genius, about whom or which so much grandiose nonsense has been scribbled, these *avvocati del diavolo* allege his own description of the influence in that last dying speech and confession, the "Apology": "This began with me from childhood, being a kind of voice which, when present, always diverts me from what I am about to do, but never urges me on." Whence they argue, with cruel exultation, that it must be self-evident to every impartial reader (whose intellects have not been bewildered by the obscure intricacies of the catacombs, wherein the mummies of dead languages have lain mouldering for millenniums) that this renowned Agathodæmon was neither more nor less than supreme vagrant indolence! It has been further argued (I shudder in writing it) that in our days he would have been prosecuted for neglecting his poor wife and children (as he also confesses in the

"Apology"), instead of trying to maintain them in comfort by working honestly at his stone-cutting business; and that he richly deserved all that he ever got from Xanthippe (who, as appears by the *Phædo*, was really a good, warm-hearted creature, devotedly attached to this idle and incorrigible old vagabond), whether it were a deluge of reproaches or a deluge of anything else. And finally, as to his much vaunted death, it has been argued that nineteen out of twenty of the men ever hanged at Tyburn or Newgate have died just as "game," without wasting time in talk about matters of which they knew nothing. So urge the dreadful depreciators: for me, who am quite ignorant with regard to all these things, I refrain from expressing or even forming any opinion until Prof. Jowett and his college (who are said to be the only men in England who have learnt any Greek) shall have delivered judgment on the whole case; and, in order to obtain such judgment, I hope the editor will send them a few copies of this formidable indictment.

But all this may be considered rather digressive, and I therefore make a sharp turn from Socrates and his somewhat unwholesome hemlock to our Ben and his good tobacco. He has indeed strangely omitted all mention of it from "Sejanus," "Catiline," "The Poetaster" (*temp.* Augustus), and most of the masques, which are mythological or romantic. Several of his comedies, however, wherein he depicts the fashions and humours of his time, do exceedingly abound in references to that newest and most extraordinary fashion and humour of smoking. All of these I cannot notice, but select the more prominent.

Beginning with the first published play, "Every Man in his Humour," who is the great smoker therein? Who but Captain Bobadill?—the renowned, the valiant, the modest, the veracious, the irresistible swordsman, who with nineteen other blades as good, or nearly as good as his own, will settle for you an army of forty thousand. We first discover this great captain in his room in the house of Cob the water-bearer, to which mean lodging we might fancy him reduced by that evil fortune which so frequently attends surpassing merit, were he not careful to let us know that he merely hides there because he would not be too popular, and generally visited as some are. Of course Cob is fascinated by his lodger: "Oh, my guest is a fine man! . . . Oh, I have a guest—he teaches me—he does swear the legiblest of any man christened: *By Saint George! the foot of Pharaoh! the body of me! as I am a gentleman and a soldier!*—such dainty oaths! and withal he does take this same filthy roguish tobacco, the finest and cleanliest: it would do a man good to see the fume come forth at's tonnel's." As tonnels is doubtless classic Cobbian for nostrils, or, as Spenser writes it, nosethrills, we learn what was then one fashionable point in smoking. Our veteran goes forth with his visitor, Master Mathew, the Town Gull, to a breakfast whose fine frugality may be partly due to the fact that Mathew has not past a two shillings or so about him. Here is a bill of fare to shame gluttons: "Come; we will have a bunch of radish and salt to taste our wine, and a pipe of tobacco to close the orifice of the stomach." Only this, and nothing more! as Poe sings, not without tautology. Was it on such a diet



that our hero built up what the angry Downright terms, "that huge tumbrel-slop," and "Gargantua breech?"

We now come to Scene 2, Act iii., of which the last part is specially devoted to the glorification of tobacco. The great Bobadill asks for a light, and exclaims: "Body o' me! here's the remainder of seven pound since yesterday was seven-night. 'Tis your right, Trinidado: Did you never take any, Master Stephen?"

"*Stephen* (a country gull).—No, truly, sir; but I'll learn to take it now, since you commend it so.

*Bobadill*.—Sir, believe me, upon my relation, for what I tell you the world shall not reprove. I have been in the Indies, where this herb grows, where neither myself, nor a dozen gentlemen more of my knowledge, have received the taste of any other nutriment in the world, for the space of one and twenty weeks, but the fume of this simple only; therefore, it cannot be, but 'tis most divine. Further, take it in the nature, in the true kind: so, it makes an antidote, that had you taken the most deadly poisonous plant in all Italy, it should expel it, and clarify you, with as much ease as I speak. And for your green wound, your Balsamum, and your St. John's wort are all mere gulleries and trash to it, especially your Trinidado. Your Nicotian is good too. I could say what I know of the virtue of it, for the expulsion of rheums, raw humours, crudities, obstructions, with a thousand of this kind; but I profess myself no quacksalver. Only this much, by Hercules I do hold it, and will affirm it before any prince in Europe, to be the most sovereign and precious weed that ever the earth tendered to the use of man."

There is a panegyric for you, and coming from such a reticent warrior! and one, moreover, who could declare with not less assurance than that Divine rogue Mercury in the glorious Greek hymn Shelley so gloriously translated:—

“you know clearly beforehand  
That all which I shall say to you is sooth ;  
I am a most veracious person, and  
Totally unacquainted with untruth.”

Gifford notes that Bobadill had good authority for the epithet Divine ; and, indeed, for the whole of his panegyric. He quotes the famous passage in the “Faërie Queene” :—

“There, whether it divine tobacco were,  
Or panacea, or polygony”—

referring to the “sovereign weed” with which Belphoebe cured the sore wound of Prince Arthur’s gentle Squire Timias (Book iii., canto v., st. 32, 33) :—

“The soveraine weede betwixt two marbles plaine  
Shee powned small, and did in peeces bruze ;  
And then atweene her lilly handes twaine  
Into his wound the juice thereof did scruze ;  
And round about, as she could well it uze,  
The flesh therewith she suppld and did steepe,  
T’ abate all spasme, and soke the swelling bruze ;  
And, after having searcht the intuse deepe,  
She with her scarf did bind the wound from cold to keep.”

Surely a very pretty piece of feminine doctoring in the heart of the wild wood green.

Gifford further notes that in his “Cosmography,” Heylin, “no incompetent judge, perhaps, of this matter,” says that the island of Trinidad abounds with the best kind of tobacco, much celebrated formerly by the name of a *Pipe of Trinidad*. He knows not what species of tobacco was meant by nicotian, this having been originally, as now, a generic term. It might mean that grown in the

particular district (Florida) from which it was brought to Jean Nicot. He remarks upon the strangeness of the fortune by which the insignificant settlement of Tobago has come to give the name by which the weed is generally known, and he says: "Many grave treatises were now extant (particularly on the Continent), which celebrated the virtues of this plant in the most extravagant terms. To listen to them, the grand elixir was scarcely more restorative and infallible." In a quaint book containing much curious information, "Opium and the Opium Appetite," by Alonzo Calkins, M.D. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1871), I find such a passage quoted, and worth requoting, from the "Message to Humanity" of one Dr. Cornelius Bonteké, who was not indeed of Jonson's time, but of that of the Restoration: "A remarkable fact it is that three things of the greatest moment to mankind were discovered at about the same era—the circumnavigation of the globe, the circulation of the blood, and *the smoking of tobacco*. [I answer not for the good doctor's statements.] This is the very best remedy to be found in the world against that root of all the diseases afflicting mankind, *the scurvy*. Is one amorous at heart and joyless in his loneliness; is he sick and weak in body, or torpid and stiff in the joints; is there pain in the head, eyes, or teeth; doth colic, or gout, or stone exist; or, is there a proneness to crapulency? Here in this glorious weed is provided an all-sufficient remedy for his manifold ills." What does your contributor, Dr. Gordon Stables, say to that?

Returning to our comedy, we soon find Master

Mathew exclaiming: "By this air, the most divine tobacco that ever I drunk"—drinking tobacco being then a common phrase for smoking it. One of Gifford's examples, from the "Scourge of Folly" by Davies, may be worth citing here:—

"Fumosus cannot eat a bit, but he  
Must drink tobacco, so to drive it down."

Just so Lane tells us of the modern Egyptians, that the terms they use for "smoking tobacco" mean "*drinking* smoke," or "*drinking* tobacco."

Poor Cob is beaten by Bobadill for vilifying the divine tobacco, and in a soliloquy of pathetic indignation, declares that it would not have grieved him had it not been his guest; one for whom, among other things, his wife Tib had "sold almost all my platters to buy him tobacco:"—your right Trinidad, O sumptuous Bobadill! Cob applies for a warrant to the merry old magistrate, Justice Clement, who at first pretends that instead of granting it he will send poor Cob to prison.

"What! a threadbare rascal, a beggar, a slave . . . and he to deprave and abuse the virtue of an herb so generally received in the courts of princes, the chambers of nobles, the bowers of sweet ladies, the cabins of soldiers!"

Wherewith we may close the subject so far as concerns "Every Man in his Humour."

It is noted that "much of what occurs in Jonson on the subject of tobacco, was written before the death of Elizabeth, who had no objection, good lady, to this or anything else which promoted the commerce, and assisted the revenues of her kingdom."

## IX

Though we cannot expect to meet such another magnificent panegyrist of our sovereign herb as the renowned and valiant Bobadill, we shall meet many who may be looked upon as subordinates in the company commanded by that great captain. The next play, "Every Man out of His Humour," is introduced by what is called *The Character of the Persons*, and in this we find smoking marked as a principal trait in three of them. First we have Fastidious Brisk, the neat, spruce, affecting courtier, who has been regarded as a Bobadill at Whitehall; and who, among other courtly accomplishments, "speaks good remnants, notwithstanding the base viol and tobacco; swears tersely, and with variety." One can understand how the base viol might hinder his speaking, though even its twanging or droning should sometimes leave gaps for "remnants," but surely the interwhiffs of tobacco afford the very best opportunities for venting such; and as to the terse swearing, there can be little doubt that its terseness was in large measure due to the pipe. Then we have Sogliardo, another edition of Stephen the country gull, who "comes up every term to learn to take tobacco, and see new motions (puppet shows)." Whereon Gifford finely glosses: "It may seem strange to enumerate taking tobacco among the accomplishments to be acquired in town; but it was then a matter of serious study, and had its professors, like the rest of the liberal arts." That this great liberal art hath no longer special professors

is doubtless owing to the fact that nearly every one now is both professor and practiser, being able easily to master the art himself. Finally, we have that admirable scamp Shift, the Cavalier Shift, one of whose chief exercises is taking tobacco, this being his sole innocent and laudable employment.

Coming to the play itself, we find almost every act odorous with those rich fumes that cheer but not inebriate. But first let me quote the beginning of the fine passage in which the poet, under the name of Asper, announces and vindicates the purpose of his comedy :—

“ Who is so patient of this impious world,  
That he can check his spirit, or rein his tongue ?  
Or who hath such a dead unfeeling sense,  
That heaven’s horrid thunders cannot wake ?  
To see the earth cracked with the weight of sin,  
Hell gaping under us, and o’er our heads  
Black, ravenous ruin, with her sail-stretched wings,  
Ready to sink us down, and cover us.  
Who can behold such prodigies as these,  
And have his lips sealed up ? Not I : my soul  
Was never ground into such oily colours,  
To flatter vice, and daub iniquity :  
But, with an armèd and resolvèd hand,  
I’ll strip the ragged follies of the time  
Naked as at their birth.”

A strain too fierce and indignant for our light and pleasant theme !

This same Asper rough-handles certain types of pretentious critics common in his day among theatrical audiences, just as Sterne dealt right sternly with the varieties of the cant of criticism common in his. (We have no dramatic criticism, or drama, in these days, but mere insipid tolerance or eulogy of stage

pieces without intellect or characters.) Among the rest, he singles out—

“How monstrous and detested is’t to see  
A fellow, that hath neither art nor brain,  
Sit like an Aristarchus, or stark ass.  
Taking men’s lines, with a tobacco face,  
In snuff, still spitting, using his wry’d looks,  
In nature of a vice, to wrest and turn  
The good aspect [regard] of those that shall sit near him  
From what they do behold!”

This passage may best be illustrated by another from the Induction to “*Cynthia’s Revels*,” performed, it will be remembered, at the Blackfriars, by the children (boys) of Queen Elizabeth’s Chapel.

“*Third Child*.—Now, sir, suppose I am one of your genteel auditors, that am come in, having paid my money at the door, with much ado, and here I take my place and sit down: I have my three sorts of tobacco in my pocket, my light by me, and thus I begin. [*At the break he takes his tobacco.*] By this light, I wonder that any man is so mad, to come to see these rascally tits play here. They do act like so many wrens or pismires—not the fifth part of a good face amongst them all. And then their music is abominable—able to stretch a man’s ears worse than ten—pillories, and their ditties—[these dashes doubtless represent whiffs] most lamentable things, like the pitiful fellows that make them—poets. By this vapour, an ’twere not for tobacco—I think—the very stench of ’em would poison me, I should not dare to come in at their gates. A man were better to visit fifteen jails—or a dozen or two of hospitals—than once adventure to come near them. How is’t? well?”

*First Child*. Excellent; give me my cloak.\*

*Third Child*. Stay; you shall see me do another now, but a more sober, or better-gathered gallant; that is, as it may be thought, some friend, or well-wisher to the house: and here I enter.

\* Whalley notes that the usual mark of the person who spoke the prologue was a long black velvet cloak.

*First Child.* What, upon the stage too?

*Second Child.* Yes; and I step forth like one of the children, and ask you, Would you have a stool, sir?

*Third Child.* A stool, boy!

*Second Child.* Ay, sir, if you'll give me sixpence I'll fetch you one.

*Third Child.* For what, I pray thee? what shall I do with it?

*Second Child.* O Lord, sir! will you betray your ignorance so much? Why, throne yourself in state upon the stage, as other gentlemen use, sir."

On which we may quote the comment of Gifford: "At the theatres in Jonson's time, spectators were admitted on the stage. Here they sat on stools, the price of which, as the situation was more or less commodious, was sixpence or a shilling: here, too, their own pages, or the boys of the house, supplied them with pipes and tobacco. Amidst such confusion and indecency were the dramatic works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries produced." Much as we admire and love the pipe, we must admit that it was quite out of place on the stage of a theatre while a genuine drama was proceeding; especially as abundant and abominable spitting appears to have been the ordinary custom of the age in smoking. How the actors got through their parts at all is a miracle; the case was even worse than in that paradise of cads, the modern music-hall, where at least the stage is free from intrusion.

Returning to "Every man out of His Humour," Carlo Buffone, the "public, scurrilous, and prophane jester, that more swift than Circe, with absurd similies will transform any person into deformity; the good feast-hound or banquet-beagle, that will scent you out a supper some three miles off; whose religion is



railing, and his discourse ribaldry ;" this amiable and honourable personage, ridiculing Fastidious Brisk's affectation of intimacy with lords, says :—

"There's ne'er a one of these but might lie a week on the rack, ere they could bring forth his name ; and yet he pours them out as familiarly as if he had seen them stand by the fire in the presence, or ta'en tobacco with them over the stage, in the lords' room."

Whereon Gifford, who has left any one else very little to do in the way of annotation : "The lords' rooms answered to the present stage-boxes. The price of admission to them appears to have been originally a shilling. Thus Decker : 'At a new play you take up the twelve-penny room, next the stage, because the lords and you may seem to be hail-fellow, well met.'—'Gull's Hornbook, 1609.'"

With Act iii. we enter the middle aisle of St. Paul's, the Mediterraneo, as Brisk terms it, then, as is well known, the common resort of persons of all professions, reputable and disreputable, and the scene of all kinds of business transactions. Here Carlo Buffone reads a bill, being one of the various baits for gulls set up by our noble friend the Cavalier Shift, otherwise Apple-John, otherwise Signor Whiffe, who justifies this last name by saying : "I have been taking an ounce of tobacco hard by here, with a gentleman, and I am come to spit private in St. Paul's ;" and who modestly avows afterwards : "It pleases the world, as I am her excellent tobacconist, to give me the style of Signor Whiffe." Thus runs the delectable advertisement :—

"If this city, or the suburbs of the same, do afford any young gentleman of the first, second, or third head, more or less, whose

friends are but lately deceased, and whose lands are but new come into his hands, that, to be as exactly qualified as the best of our ordinary gallants are, is affected to entertain the most gentlemanlike use of tobacco ; as first, to give it the most exquisite perfume ; then, to know all the delicate sweet forms for the assumption of it ; as also the rare corollary and practice of the Cuban ebolition, euripus, and whiff, which he shall receive, or take in here at London, and evaporate at Uxbridge, or farther, if it please him. If there be any such generous spirit, that is truly enamoured of these good faculties ; may it please him, but by a note of his hand to specify the place or ordinary where he uses to eat and lie ; and most sweet attendance, with tobacco and pipes of the best sort, shall be ministered. *Stet, quaso, candide Lector.*"

Candid reader, in sooth ! Did I not well in calling our Shift admirable ? Who in our degenerate days can compose such a tobacco advertisement as that ? It is not surpassed even by that stupendous feat of genius of Madame Rachel, of the wonder-working water from the Fountain of Youth, the Well of Life, brought, lest its celestial virtues should evaporate, by relays of swift dromedaries from the heart of the Libyan Desert ! It would appear by the text that the *whiff* was a long retention of the smoke low down somewhere, such as is practised in Spain, maybe a drawing it down into the lungs, as is customary in the East : Gifford quotes from Daniel :—

" This herb in powder made, and fired, he sucks,  
Out of a little hollow instrument  
Of calcinated clay, the smoke thereof :  
Which either he conveys out of his nose,  
Or down into his stomach with a whiff."

And again from the "Gull's Hornbook" :—

"Then let him shew his several tricks in taking the whiffe, the ring, &c., for these are compliments (accomplishments) that

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gain gentlemen no mean respect ; and for which indeed they are more worthily noticed than for any skill they have in learning."

As for the *Cuban ebolition*, or ebullition, we can but guess at its nature from its name ; and as for the *curipus*, we can but conjecture with probability that as the Euripus was the ancient name of the strait between Eubœa and the continent, proverbial for its frequent flux and reflux, the term signified inhaling and exhaling smoke in swift succession.

The bait of this keen and bright prospectus soon attracts its fish :—

"*Sogliardo*. Nay, good sir, house your head : do you profess these sleights in tobacco ?

*Shift*. I do more than profess, sir, and, if you please to be a practitioner, I will undertake in one fortnight to bring you that you shall take it plausibly in any ordinary, theatre, or the Tilt-yard, if need be, in the most popular assembly that is.

*Puntarvolo* ['a vain-glorious knight, over-englishing his travels']. But you cannot bring him to the whiffe so soon ?

*Shift*. Yes, as soon, sir ; he shall receive the first, second, and third whiffe, if it please him, and, upon the receipt, take his horse, drink his three cups of Canary, and, expose [exhale] one at Hounslow, a second at Stains, and a third at Bagshot."

Fascinated by the which modest and veracious assurances, Sogliardo persuades him, nothing loth, to stay and dine, and even presses upon him, nothing loth, a poor French crown for the ordinary, saying : "If we can agree, we'll not part in haste." Doubt not that they agree, when Shift is above all determined not to disagree : will the angler willingly part in haste from his hooked fish ? The result is reported in Act iv., Sc. 4 :—

*Punt.* [to *Carlo*]. Was your new-created gallant with you there, Sogliardo?

*Carlo.* O porpoise! hang him, no; he's a leiger [permanent resident] at Horn's ordinary yonder; his villainous Ganymede and he have been droning a tobacco-pipe there ever since yesterday noon.

*Punt.* Who? Signior Tripartite [meaning Shift of the three appellations], that would give my dog the whiffe?

*Carlo.* Ay, he. They have hired a chamber and all, private, to practise in, for the making of the patoun, the receipt reciprocal, and a number of other mysteries not yet extant [revealed]. I brought some dozen or twenty gallants this morning to view them, as you'd do a piece of perspective, in at a key-hole; and there we might see Sogliardo sit in a chair, holding his snout up like a sow under an apple-tree, while the other opened his nostrils with a poking-stick, to give the smoke a more free delivery. They had spit some three or four score ounces between 'em afore we came away.

*Punt.* How! spit three or four score ounces?

*Carlo.* Ay, and preserved it in porrengers, as a barber does his blood when he opens a vein.

*Punt.* Out, pagan! how dost thou open the vein of thy friend?

*Carlo.* Friend! is there any such foolish thing in the world, ha? 'slid, I never relished [tasted] it yet.

*Punt.* Thy humour is the more dangerous."

Truly it is hideous, with the poking-stick for the nostrils and the spittle in porrengers; but we may hope that the scurrilous and profane jester, whose religion is railing and his discourse ribaldry, is exaggerating, if he is not wholly inventing. *Droning* a tobacco-pipe occurs again in the "Silent Woman," Act iv., Sc. 1: "As he lies on his back droning a tobacco-pipe." The phrase seems suggestive of a happy monotony of indolence; the slow, sleepy breathing, as of an insect drone in summer, breathed through a tube like the drone of a bagpipe: it also

appears to be a coinage of Ben's. As to the *patoun* and the *receipt reciprocal*, they remain esoteric, and we are left to mere conjecture. Gifford remarks that as *pâtons*, in French, are those small pellets of paste with which poultry are crammed, making of the *patoun* may mean moulding the tobacco, which was then always cut small, into some fantastic or fashionable shape for the pipe. *Petun*, we know, was one of the Indian names of tobacco, and was adopted in France, being commonly used by St. Amant and other jovial French writers about contemporary with Jonson, though I believe it is now obsolete; and *patoun* may have some connection with *petun*. With regard to the *receipt reciprocal*, Gifford suggests that it not improbably meant the passing of the pipe from one to the other; but there would be no mystery in this. He alleges the *ring*, in the passage already cited from Decker's "Gull's Hornbook," as meaning the same; but I think it more probably meant puffing out the smoke so as to form rings of which the one should pass through the other, &c., a not uncommon practice in our own day. In conclusion, on these occult matters, I quote the memorandum by Steevens which Whalley transcribed on the margin of his copy: "Mr. Reed, who may be considered as the high-priest of black letter, declares no book to have been written containing instructions how to take tobacco [a woeful want!]. You have, therefore, not a single auxiliary on the present subject, except your own sagacity; and must of course be content to rank the *patoun*, &c., among the 'mysteries not yet extant.'—Aug. 29, 1781."

Leaving these abstruse and obscure mysteries, we

go back to Act iii., Sc. 3—An apartment at court : Enter Macilente (who does not concern us), Fastidious, and Cinedo (his page) with tobacco. For what has our gay Brisk come? He has come to lay his homage at the feet of Saviolina, “a court-lady, whose weightiest praise is a light wit, admired by herself, and one more, her servant Brisk.” Now we learn what the author meant when he said of this gallant, he “speaks good remnants notwithstanding the base viol and tobacco ;” for with those two sweet instruments, the pipe and the viol de gambo, our enamoured courtier courts his mistress—alas ! in vain, for poetical wooings are rarely successful in this gross world. At first euphuism is intermitted for puff, puff ; then for hum, hum ; then again for puff, puff. Here is a fragment from the close : she has taken the viol to tune it :—

“*Fast.* You see the subject of her sweet fingers there—Oh, she tickles it so, that—She makes it laugh most divinely ; I’ll tell you a good jest now, and yourself shall say it’s a good one : I have wished myself to be that instrument, I think, a thousand times, and not so few, by heaven . . .

*Sav.* Here, servant, if you will play, come.

*Fast.* Instantly, sweet lady.—In good faith, here’s most divine tobacco !

*Sav.* Nay, I cannot stay to dance after your pipe.

*Fast.* Good ! nay, dear lady, stay ; by this sweet smoke, I think your wit be all fire . . .

*Sav.* Is your tobacco perfumed, servant, that you swear by the sweet smoke ?

*Fast.* Still more excellent ! Before heaven, and these bright lights, I think—you are made of ingenuity, I—Will your ladyship take any ?

*Sav.* O, peace, I pray you ; I love not the breath of a woodcock’s head.

*Fast.* Meaning my head, lady ?

*Sav.* Not altogether so, sir ; but, as it were fatal to their follies that think to grace themselves with taking tobacco, when they want better entertainment, you see your pipe bears the true form of a woodcock's head.

*Fast.* O admirable simile !

*Sav.* 'Tis best leaving of you in admiration, sir. [EXIT.]”

Thus are idols insensible to the sweetest incense burnt to them ! Woodcock was a cant term for a fool. Gifford gives a drawing of an ancient pipe, in which he discerns pretty nearly the true form of a woodcock's head.

Tobacco is mentioned on other occasions in “Every Man out of His Humour,” but the allusions are scarcely of sufficient importance to be noted here. One remark must be made in closing. The objects of ridicule in this play are not things or customs themselves, but the affectations or exaggerations of them. Courtliness or courtesy, wit, learning, swordsmanship, and tobacco are all good, though the mere pretension to them, or the fantastic abuse of them, is comically contemptible.

## X

“Cynthia's Revels ; or, the Fountain of Self-Love” (1600) has but two or three allusions to tobacco in addition to those cited from the Induction in the preceding section. The first scene opens with a dialogue between Cupid and Mercury. To the unequalled virtues and endowments of the precocious son of Maia and Zeus, the most frank and liberal tribute is paid in the Homeric Hymn translated by Shelley, from which I have already quoted :—

“ Now, when the joy of Jove had its fulfilling,  
And Heaven’s tenth moon chronicled her relief,  
She gave to light a babe all babes excelling,  
A schemer subtle beyond all belief,  
A shepherd of thin dreams, a cow-stealing,  
A night-watching, and door-waylaying thief,  
Who ’mongst the Gods was soon about to thieve,  
And other glorious actions to achieve.

“ The babe was born at the first peep of day ;  
He began playing on the lyre at noon ;  
And the same evening did he steal away  
Apollo’s herds.”

It will, I think, be some considerable time before our new system of national education and the law of heredity can develop another such infant phenomenon! His lyre this half-day old made himself with the shell of a tortoise, having “bored the life and soul out of the beast;” and when he had made it he sang to its accompaniment, and truly remarkable were the earliest themes of his unpremeditated song :—

“ He sung how Jove and May of the bright sandal  
Dallied in love not quite legitimate ;  
And his own birth, still scoffing at the scandal,  
And naming his own name, did celebrate ;  
His mother’s cave and servant-maids he planned all  
In plastic verse, her household stuff and state,  
Perennial pot, trippet, and brazen pan ;—  
But singing he conceived another plan.”

“Seized with a sudden fancy for fresh meat,” the *enfant terrible* went forth and stole fifty of Apollo’s kine; yet, when this little affair had been settled (Hermes getting a half-share in what he finely called



"the herds in litigation"), Apollo himself thus praised him :—

" This glory and power thou dost from Jove inherit,  
To teach all craft upon the earth below ;  
Thieves love and worship thee—it is thy merit  
To make all mortal business ebb and flow  
By roguery."

In this last matter we are, perhaps, entitled to felicitate ourselves on being somewhat ahead of even the old Greeks ! In our dramatic "Comical Satire," Cupid, addressing Mercury, is no less candid than the hymn. Thus :—

" . . . my mother Venus . . . but stoop'd to embrace you, and (to speak by metaphor) you borrow'd a girdle of hers, as you did Jove's sceptre (while he was laughing) and would have done his thunder too, but that 'twas too hot for your itching fingers. . . . I heard, you but looked in at Vulcan's forge the other day, and entreated a pair of his new tongs along with you for company : 'tis joy on you i' faith, that you will keep your hooked talons in practice with anything. 'Slight, now you are on earth, we shall have you filch spoons and candlesticks rather than fail : pray Jove the perfumed courtiers keep their casting-bottles, pick-tooths and shittle-cocks from you, or our more ordinary gallants their tobacco-boxes ; for I am strangely jealous of your nails."

From which it appears that the use of tobacco was already almost universal among gentlemen of the court ; the abstainers being principally such perfumed, finical, effeminate, queasy dandies as had been probably turned inside out by their first and last attempt at a pipe.

In Act ii., Sc. 2, we have the character of Anaides, who is the caricature of Eutolmos or good Audacity.

Cupid asks : "Is that a courtier too?" and Mercury replies (I perforce condense) :—

"Troth no; he has two essential parts of the courtier, pride and ignorance; marry, the rest come somewhat after the ordinary gallant. 'Tis impudence itself, Anaides; one that speaks all that comes in his cheeks, and will blush no more than a sackbut. . . . He will censure or discourse of any thing, but as absurdly as you would wish. His fashion is not to take knowledge of him that is beneath him in clothes. He never drinks [*to any*] below the salt. He does naturally admire his wit that wears gold lace or tissue. Stabs any man that speaks more contemptibly [contemptuously] of the scholar than he. He is a great proficient in all the illiberal sciences, as cheating, drinking, swaggering, whoring, and such like: never kneels but to pledge healths, nor prays but for a pipe of pudding-tobacco. The oaths which he vomits at one supper would maintain a town of garrison in good swearing a twelve-month."

On the pipe of pudding-tobacco Gifford notes: "It appears from the Induction that there were 'three sorts of tobacco' then in vogue; which, from the names scattered over our old plays, seem to be the leaf, pudding, and cane-tobacco. I can give the reader no other information respecting them, than that cane-tobacco appears to have been the most expensive of the whole :—

" 'The nostrils of his chimnies are still stuffed  
With smoak more chargeable than cane tobacco.'  
—*Merry Devil of Edmonton.*"

At the end of the piece the nymphs and gallants who have drunk at the Fountain of Self-Love, and been but apes and counterfeits of truly noble and gentle courtiers, are adjudged to perform penance at Niobe's stone or Weeping-cross, and then to purge themselves at "the Well of Knowledge, Helicon"

(not Hippocrene; and so elsewhere in Jonson, though my Lord Winchelsea, with immense self-sufficiency, denounced a certain Miltonic poem as spurious because it thus made the mount a spring), and leave the stage in pairs singing a palinode, in the form of a litany, whereof one verse is—

“From stabbing of arms, flap-dragons, healths, whiffs, and all such swaggering humours,

*Chorus.* Good Mercury defend us.”

Of whiffs we have had enough in “Every Man out of his Humour”; for the stabbing of arms Gifford brings two apposite quotations:—

“How many gallants have drank healths to me  
Out of their daggered arms!”

—*Decker's “Honest Whore.”*

“By the faith of a soldier, lady, I do reverence the ground that you walk upon. I will fight with him that dares say you are not fair, stab him that will not pledge your health, and with a dagger open a vein to drink a full health to you.”—*Green's “Tu Quoque.”*

In the Apologetical Dialogue added to the “Poet-aster” (1601)—see Section 2—the author, referring to his assailants, Decker, Marston, and the rest, says:—

“or I could do worse,  
Armed with Archilochus' fury, write Iambics.  
Should make the desperate lashers hang themselves,  
Rhime them to death, as they do Irish rats\*”

\* “I was never so be-rhimed since Pythagoras' time, that I was an Irish rat.”—*As You Like It*, Act iii., Sc. 2.

In drumming tunes. Or, living, I could stamp  
Their foreheads with those deep and public brands,  
That the whole company of barber-surgeons  
Should not take off, with all their art and plasters.  
And these my prints should last, still to be read  
In their pale fronts ; when what they write 'gainst me  
Shall, like a figure drawn in water, fleet,  
And the poor wretched papers be employed  
To clothe tobacco, or some cheaper drug :  
This I could do, and make them infamous.  
But to what end ? when their own deeds have mark'd 'em ;  
And that I know, within his guilty breast  
Each slanderer bears a whip that shall torment him  
Worse than a million of these temporal plagues :  
Which to pursue were but a feminine humour,  
And far beneath the dignity of man."

So Ben in pure scorn refrains from branding them,  
the while his red-hot irons are hissing in their  
blood !

In "Volpone ; or, The Fox" (1605), whose scene  
is Venice, tobacco, I think, is mentioned but once,  
Act ii., Sc. 1. In order to obtain sight of the beautiful  
Celia, the chaste spouse of the jealous and infamous  
Corvino, that crafty old Fox, Volpone, whose  
monstrous avarice ministers to more monstrous lusts,  
disguises himself as a mountebank doctor, and has  
his stage erected in front of her house in a retired  
corner of the Piazza of St. Mark. Here he dis-  
cusses in first-rate quack or cheap-jack style, with  
that voluble and impressive eloquence which leaves  
the pulpit, the bar, and the senate quite out of the  
race, on his unique panacea, "this blessed unguento,  
this rare extraction," surnamed *Oglio del Scoto* (he  
appears in the character of *Scoto Mantuano*), and  
on his also unique powder—

"Here is a powder, concealed in this paper, of which, if I should speak to the worth, nine thousand volumes were but as one page, that page as a line, that line as a word ; so short is this pilgrimage of man (which some call life) to the expressing of it. Would I reflect on the price ? why, the whole world is but as an empire, that empire as a province, that province as a bank, that bank as a private purse, to the purchase of it. I will only tell you ; it is the powder that made Venus a goddess (given her by Apollo), that kept her perpetually young, cleared her wrinkles, firmed her gums, filled her skin, coloured her hair ; from her derived to Helen, and at the sack of Troy unfortunately lost : till now, in this our age, it was as happily recovered, by a studious antiquary, out of some ruins of Asia, who sent a moiety of it to the court of France (but much sophisticated), wherewith the ladies now colour their hair. The rest, at this present, remains with me ; extracted to a quintessence : so that whatever it but touches, in youth it perpetually preserves, in age restores the complexion."

When he pauses to take breath in this prodigious flux of oratory, the interval is filled by "a verse extempore" in honour of the medicaments by his dwarf Nano, who acts as the buffoon always accompanying such a mountebank. Thus sings Nano to the glory of the oil :—

" Had old Hippocrates, or Galen, -  
That to their books put med'cines all in,  
But known this secret, they had never  
(Of which they will be guilty ever)  
Been murderers of so much paper,  
Or wasted many a hurtless taper ;  
No Indian drug had e'er been famed,  
Tobacco, sassafras not named ;  
Ne yet of guacum one small stick, sir,  
Nor Raymond Lully's great elixir.  
Ne had been known the Danish Gonswart,  
Or Paracelsus with his long sword."

Another proof, if proof were needed, of the then high pharmaceutic reputation of tobacco ; a reputation, be

it observed, which it long kept, and still maintains to a considerable degree in many lands, and to which (bating the old uncritical extravagances) it has far more serious and solid claims than are generally admitted in our time and country.

In "Epicœne; or, The Silent Woman" (1609), I have already referred to Act iv., Sc. 1: "As he lies on his back droning a tobacco-pipe." There is another phrase worth mention; not in itself, for it is very trivial and common in the writers of the time, but on account of Gifford's note:—

"*He went away in snuff* (Act iv., Sc. 2), *i.e.*, in anger: alluding, I presume, to the offensive manner in which a candle goes out. The word is frequent in our old writers, and furnishes Shakespeare with many playful opportunities of confounding it with the dust of tobacco."

Now, in Section viii., I wrote: "It has, too, been often remarked that Shakespeare never mentions or alludes to tobacco, though he may have smoked many a good pipe with Raleigh himself at the 'Mermaid.' It is to be feared that the remark is deplorably well founded. . . . Many of the personages are continually taking snuff, but this does not appear to have been supplied by the tobacconist." Gifford was so well-read, painstaking, and accurate, that I withdraw the above and suspend my judgment on this important matter until I am able to investigate it again. In the meanwhile, as affording some presumption in my favour and against Gifford, it may be remarked, on the authority of "the once celebrated Charles Lillie," perfumer, London, 1740, as stated in a little book called "Nicotiana; or the Smoker's

and Snuff-Taker's Companion" (London: Effingham Wilson, 1832), by Henry James Meller, Esq., that snuff-taking was very rare, and indeed very little known in England, being chiefly a luxurious habit among foreigners residing here, and a few English gentry who had travelled abroad, until 1702, when the expedition sent out under Sir George Rooke and the Duke of Ormond, to make a descent on Cadiz, captured among other rich booty several thousand barrels and casks of the finest snuffs of Spanish manufacture, and immense quantities of gross snuff from Havana, in bales, bags, and scrows (untanned hides of buffaloes sown with thongs of the same). The whole quantity taken was estimated at fifty tons' weight; and much of this being sold by the captors at a very low price, snuff-taking soon became a popular custom and fashion.

## XI

We are now at the culmination of Jonson's genius, "The Alchemist" (1610; *æt.* 37, about which age so many of the illustrious culminate or perish); and here we meet Abel Drugger, a tobacco man, one of the favourite parts of Garrick. This masterpiece of comedy, admirable in all respects, is not least admirable for its construction, a department in which nearly all our really great dramatists and novelists have been so poor (Fielding, particularly in "Tom Jones," is a shining exception) that they have been driven to beg, borrow, or steal, or fail. In "The Alchemist" we have a thoroughly original plot, full of vigorous and

complicated action, involving the most diversified characters, so closely and deftly knit that, without sacrifice of probability, the scene is concentrated in one house and the lane in front of it, and the time is no more than is occupied in the representation. The acrostic Argument indicates the mainspring of the piece very succinctly :—

“The sickness hot, a master quit, for fear,  
His house in town, and left one servant there ;  
Ease him corrupted, and gave means to know

A Cheater and his punk ; who now brought low,  
Leaving their narrow practice were become  
Cozeners at large ; and only wanting some  
House to set up, with him they here contract,  
Each for a share, and all begin to act.”

The cheater is Subtle, alchemist, fortune-teller, astrologer, dealer in familiar spirits (not of alcohol), passed master gamester, &c. &c. His worthy companion is Dol Common, who plays whatever parts occasion may call for. The servant is Jeremy, the butler, who, as Captain Face, touts for the firm, and also acts as Ulen Spiegel, the Lungs, Puffe, or Assistant of Subtle. “Much company they draw,” continues the Argument ; and finely, in sooth, do they draw all the hooked and netted fish and fowl. Dapper, the lawyer’s clerk, comes for a fly or familiar, “to rifle with at horses, and win cups ;” and then, as his greed grows, for one that shall enable him to win at all games. Tribulation Wholesome and Ananias, a pastor and deacon at Amsterdam, come for the philosopher’s stone and the elixir of immortality ; for which also comes Sir Epicure Mammon, “a



grave sir, a rich, that has no need, a wise sir, too, at other times," whose exuberance of voluptuous anticipation is as inexhaustible as the wealth and health at the command of the lord of the stone and the elixir, though a harvest of such foison has been reaped before in the same fields by the sensual raptures of "Volpone;" Dame Pliant, the rich and buxom young widow, comes to have her fortune told, and her brother Kastril to learn all the niceties of the quarrel and the duello, which, as we know by Touchstone's exposition, were then subtle exceedingly. Our modest and innocent friend Abel comes likewise; and he, for tobacco's sake, must be put in scene as he makes his first appearance (Act. i., Sc. 1):—

*Subtle.* What is your name, say you, Abel Drugger?

*Drugger.* Yes, sir.

*Sub.* A seller of tobacco?

*Drug.* Yes, sir.

*Sub.* Umph! Free of the grocers [the Grocers' Company]?

*Drug.* Ay, an't please you.

*Sub.* Well—your business, Abel?

*Drug.* This, an't please your worship:

I am a young beginner, and am building

Of a new shop, an't like your worship, just

At corner of a street:—Here is the plot on't—

And I would know by art, sir, of your worship,

Which way I should make my door, by necromancy.

And where my shelves; and which should be for boxes,

And which for pots. I would be glad to thrive, sir:

I was wished to your worship by a gentleman,

One Captain Face, that says you know men's planets,

And their good angels, and their bad.

*Sub.* I do,

If I do see them. [An angel was also a coin.]

*Re-enter FACE.*

*Face.* What! my honest Abel?

Thou art well met here.

*Drug.* Troth, sir, I was speaking,  
Just as your worship came here, of your worship :  
I pray you speak for me to master doctor.

*Face.* He shall do anything. Doctor, do you hear ?  
This is my friend Abel, an honest fellow ;  
He lets me have good tobacco, and he does not  
Sophisticate it with sack-lees or oil,  
Nor washes it in muscadell and grains,  
Nor buries it in gravel, under ground,  
Wrapped up in greasy leather, or pissed clouts :  
But keeps it in fine lily pots, that, opened,  
Smell like conserve of roses, or French beans,  
He has his maple block, his silver tongs,  
Winchester pipes, and fire of juniper :  
A neat, spruce, honest fellow, and no goldsmith.

[In the sense of money-lender, usurer.]

*Sub.* He is a fortunate fellow, that I am sure on.

*Face.* Already, sir, have you found it ? Lo thee, Abel !

*Sub.* And in right way toward riches——

*Face.* Sir !

*Sub.* This summer

He will be of the clothing of his company,  
And next spring called to the scarlet ; spend what he can.

*Face.* What, and so little beard ?

*Sub.* Sir, you must think,  
He may have a receipt to make hair come :  
But he'll be wise, preserve his youth, and fine for't.  
His fortune looks for him another way.

*Face.* 'Slid, doctor, how canst thou know this so soon ?  
I am amused [amazed] at that.

*Sub.* By a rule, captain,  
In metoposcopy, which I do work by ;  
A certain star in the forehead, which you see not.  
Your chesnut or your olive-coloured face  
Does never fail : and your long ear doth promise.  
I knew't by certain spots, too, in his teeth,  
And on the nail of his Mercurial finger.

*Face.* Which finger's that ?

*Sub.* His little finger. Look.  
You were born upon a Wednesday ?

*Drug.* Yes, indeed, sir.

*Sub.* The thumb, in chiromancy, we give Venus ;  
 The forefinger to Jove ; the midst to Saturn ;  
 The ring to Sol ; the least to Mercury,  
 Who was the lord, sir, of his horoscope,  
 His house of life being Libra ; which foreshewed  
 He should be a merchant, and should trade with balance.

*Face.* Why, this is strange ! Is it not, honest Nab ?

*Sub.* There is a ship now coming from Ormus,  
 That shall yield him such a commodity  
 Of drugs—This is the west, and this the south ?

[*Pointing to the plan.*]

*Drug.* Yes, sir.

*Sub.* And those are your two sides.

*Drug.* Ay, sir.

*Sub.* Make me your door, then, south ; your broad side  
 west :

And on the east side of your shop, aloft,  
 Write, Mathlai, Tarmiel, and Baraborat ;  
 Upon the north part, Rael, Velet, Thiel.  
 They are the names of those Mercurial spirits  
 That do fright flies from boxes.

*Drug.* Yes, sir.

*Sub.* And

Beneath your threshold, bury me a loadstone  
 To draw in gallants that wear spurs : the rest,  
 They'll seem to follow.

*Face.* That's a secret, Nab !

*Sub.* And on your stall, a puppet, with a vice  
 And a court-fucus,\* to call city-dames :  
 You shall deal much with minerals.

*Drug.* Sir, I have  
 At home, already—

*Sub.* Ay, I know you have arsenic,  
 Vitriol, sal-tartar, argaile, alkali,  
 Cinoper : I know all.—This fellow, captain,  
 Will come in time to be a great distiller [chemist],  
 And give a say†—I will not say directly,  
 But very fair—at the philosopher's stone.

\* A doll moved by wires, with face painted or rouged.

† Assay, essay ; attempt or trial.

*Face.* Why, how now, Abel! is this true?

*Drug.* Good captain,

What must I give?

[*Aside to FACE.*

*Face.* Nay, I'll not counsel thee.

Thou hear'st what wealth (he says, spend what thou canst)

Thou'rt like to come to.

*Drug.* I would gi' him a crown.

*Face.* A crown! and toward such a fortune? heart,

Thou shalt rather gi' him thy shop. No gold about thee?

*Drug.* Yes, I have a portague\* I have kept this half-year.

*Face.* Out on thee, Nab! 'Slight, there was such an offer—

Shalt keep't no longer, I'll give't him for thee. Doctor,

Nab prays your worship to drink this, and swears

He will appear more grateful, as your skill

Does raise him in the world.

*Drug.* I would entreat

Another favour of his worship.

*Face.* What is't, Nab?

*Drug.* But to look over, sir, my almanack,

And cross out my ill days, that I may neither

Bargain, nor trust upon them.

*Face.* That he shall, Nab;

Leave it; it shall be done 'gainst afternoon.

*Sub.* And a direction for his shelves.

*Face.* Now, Nab,

Art thou well pleased, Nab?

*Drug.* 'Thank, sir, both your worships.

*Face.* Away.

[*Exit DRUGGER.*"]

The above quotation is very long, but the scene is too good to be mangled; and, moreover, only by giving it in full could the exquisite simplicity of Abel and the exquisite roguery of the accomplices be adequately developed for such as do not know the play. It will be observed that Drugger says very little, telling his business and answering questions

\* A gold coin worth about £3, 12s. "Holinshead mentions the portague as a piece very solemnly kept of divers."

as briefly as possible, and being only profuse in interjections of humble thanks to the sharpeners who are plucking him. The attraction of the part for Garrick doubtless consisted in its liberal scope for the eloquent pantomime of gait, attitude, gesture, facial expression, of which he was so consummate a master, alike in tragedy and comedy. Eyes intent on him only must have read the speeches of Subtle and Face with scarcely less precision and far deeper impression than the ears heard them. As a great composer will maintain the identity of a simple air or fugal theme through countless intricate variations, combinations, and transformations, so we can imagine the great mimic preserving the original simple Druggier through a manifold diversity of humorous phases; and the good Partridge would have found him no more an actor in this than in *Hamlet*, remarking to his patron, Tom Jones, that any one in the circumstances would have looked and done just as Mr. Garrick did.

Referring to Face's recommendation of Abel, Gifford notes:—

‘It should be observed that the houses of druggists (tobacconists) were not merely furnished with tobacco, but with conveniences for smoking it. Every well-frequented shop was an academy of this ‘noble art,’ where professors regularly attended to initiate the country aspirant. Abel's shop is very graphically described, and seems to be one of the most fashionable kind. The *maple block* was for shredding the tobacco leaf, the *silver tongs* for holding the coal, and the *fire of juniper* for the customers to light their pipes. Juniper is not lightly

mentioned; 'when once kindled,' Fuller says, 'it is hardly quenched;' and Upton observes, from Cardan, that 'a coal of juniper, if covered with its own ashes, will retain its fire a whole year.'" Juniper was, moreover, burnt in Jonson's time to sweeten the air of chambers. Thus, in the character of the persons prefixed to "Every Man out of his Humour," Deliro is described as "a good doting citizen, . . . a fellow sincerely besotted on his own wife, and so rapt with a conceit of her perfections, that he simply holds himself unworthy of her. . . . He doth sacrifice twopence in juniper to her every morning before she rises, and wakes her with villainous out-of-tune music, which she, out of her contempt (though not out of her judgment), is sure to dislike." See also "Cynthia's Revels," Act ii., Sc. 1.

We are horrified to learn from this same speech of Face into what loathsome depths of iniquity the black art of sophisticating pure tobacco had plunged so soon after its blessed introduction into common use here. But this was chiefly the fault of that sapient fool or fatuous sage, James I., who, by one of the earliest Acts of his reign, in 1604, increased the importation duty from twopence to six shillings and tenpence per lb. (probably equal to 30s. now), an advance at one wild leap of exactly four thousand per cent. ! A pretty premium upon adulteration and smuggling. "In consequence of this, nearly a stagnation of the trade took place; and Stith informs us that so low was it reduced in 1611 [the year after the production of the "Alchemist"], that only 142,085 lbs. weight were imported from Virginia, not amounting to one-sixth of the previous annual supply" ("Nico-

tiana," pp. 38, 39). Culture at home was then tried, but another Act was passed in 1620 prohibiting this. It was also discovered that "the wisest fool in Christendom" had only imposed the monstrous duty on tobacco from Virginia; and recourse was had to the Spanish and Portuguese possessions, whose tobacco thus came in at the old twopence, to the heavy injury of our own colonists! These naturally complained, and so in 1624 yet another Act lessened the duty on their produce, and prohibited importation of any other. As the trade began to revive under this, James finished his reign as he had begun it, by an attempt to cut down the inveterate weed he could not uproot: he had a law made imposing heavy penalties on any one dealing in tobacco without royal letters patent. "A blow so sudden and unexpected occasioned the ruin, we are told, of many thousands, and the trade went rapidly to decay." ("Nicotiana," pp. 39, 40.) It was by this consistent and enlightened course of conduct that the Most High and Mighty Prince James justified the free and independent gratulations of those who accomplished our Authorised Version of the Bible: "For whereas it was the expectation of many, who wished not well to our *Sion*, that upon the setting of that bright *Occidental Star*, *Queen Elizabeth*, of most happy memory, some thick and palpable clouds of darkness [breathed from myriads of tobacco-pipes] would so have overshadowed this land, . . . the appearance of your Majesty, as of the *Sun* in his strength, instantly dispelled those supposed and surmised mists [by the before-mentioned Acts and the "Counterblast:" but how dispel mists which were not in existence, being only supposed

and surmised?]" &c. &c. This is how the modern Solomon dealt with a precious and wholesome luxury, rapidly growing into an almost universal necessary of really civilised life, and the duty on which in 1875, just 250 years after his death, contributed £7,720,558 to the national revenue, being  $38\frac{3}{4}$  per cent. of all the Customs, 5 per cent. more than spirits, and over twice as much as tea! And, even in his own time, he was so far foiled in his demented war *à outrance* against the "weed of glorious feature" (Wordsworth!) that, as I read in Dr. Carrick Murray's little work on Smoking (p. 70): "From 'The Honesty of the Age,' by Barnaby Rych, published in 1614, two years before the celebrated 'Counterblast,' we learn there were 'upwards of 7000 houses that doeth live by that trade in London, and near about London.'"

And now we must postpone to another section the further consideration of honest Abel Drugger, who, unsophisticated himself, supplied unsophisticated tobacco.

## XII

The second Act introduces Sir Epicure Mammon, who has been promised by Subtle that the magisterium, the great work, both philosopher's stone and elixir, will be perfected for him this day. Mammon is accompanied by his unbelieving friend, Pertinax Surly, a gamester, whose incredulity he overwhelms, if he cannot drown it, with torrents of eloquence, swelling into boundless floods of dithyrambic rapture when he catalogues to Face, disguised as Lungs, some of the



stupendous luxuries in which he means to revel. It is not within my purpose to quote from these wonderful rhapsodies, nor would fragmentary quotation do them any justice, their effect being strictly cumulative; but I cannot help citing the note on them, of him whom we all love as dearly as he himself loved old plays and tobacco—the subtle, sympathising critic, whose appreciation of our Elizabethan poetry, and especially dramatic poetry, is all but infallible; and who has the gift of such exquisite and unique expression. Of course I mean Charles Lamb.

“The judgment is perfectly overwhelmed by the torrent of images, words, and book-knowledge with which Mammon confounds and stuns his incredulous hearer; they come pouring out like the successive strokes of Nilus. They ‘doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe.’ Description outstrides proof. We are made to believe effects before we have testimony for their causes: as a lively description of the joys of heaven sometimes passes for an argument to prove the existence of such a place. If there be no one image which rises to the height of the sublime, yet the confluence and assemblage of them all produces an effect equal to the grandest poetry. Xerxes’ army, that drank up whole rivers from their numbers, may stand for single Achilles. Epicure Mammon is the most determined offspring of the author. . . . What a ‘tow’ring bravery’ there is in his sensuality! He affects no pleasure under a Sultan. It is as if ‘Egypt with Assyria strove in luxury.’”—*Specimens of English Dramatic Poets, who lived about the time of Shakespeare.*

Well may Mr. H. H. Furness, in the preface to his invaluable Variorum Edition of Hamlet, lament the fine genius wasted in the South Sea House, and say that if England had known what a precious gift she had in Elia, she would have endowed him with unvexed leisure for the study and interpretation of our grand old writers.

When Mammon has departed, not without leaving more gold to make sure and perfect the final projection, Ananias, the deacon of Amsterdam, comes in, and is soon packed off, with threats that the work shall be ruined if additional money is not brought within the hour; then re-enter Face in his uniform, followed by Drugger. Subtle affects anger at the interruption, and Face gets another piece of gold out of poor Nab to appease him. Abel wants a lucky and thriving sign for his shop:—

“*Face.* What say you to his constellation, doctor,  
The Balance?

*Sub.* No, that way is stale and common.  
A townsman born in Taurus gives the bull,  
Or the bull’s head : in Aries the ram,  
A poor device ! No, I will have his name  
Formed in some mystic character ; whose radii,  
Striking the senses of the passers-by ;  
Shall, by a virtual influence, breed affections,  
That may result upon the party owns it :  
As thus——

*Face.* Nab !

*Sub.* He shall have a *bel* that’s *Abel* ;  
And by it standing one whose name is *Dee*,  
In a *rug* gown, there’s *D* ; and *rug*, that’s *drug* ;  
And right anenst him a dog snarling *er* ;  
There’s *Drug-er* : Abel Drugger. That’s his sign.  
And here now’s mystery and hieroglyphic !

*Face.* Abel, thou art made.

*Drug.* Sir, I do thank his worship.

*Face.* Six o’ thy legs more will not do it, Nab.\*  
He has brought you a pipe of tobacco, doctor.

*Drug.* Yes, sir——”

The *Dee* in a *rug* gown, as Gifford, of course, notes, is levelled at the then notorious Dr. Dee, a

\* Drugger had “made a leg,” or reverence, in humbly thanking his very worshipful worship.

great pretender to astrology, alchemy, and magic. Beginning as dupe, he soon developed into cheat; for in this department of natural history the shrewder pigeons, when plucked, are apt to turn hawks; and with the equally notorious Kelly rambled over Europe, ostensibly as conjurer, really as spy. On his return, he settled at Mortlake, where, notwithstanding his possession of the philosopher's stone, he died in extreme poverty, being, as Lilly says, "enforced many times to sell some book or other to buy a dinner." In the print before one of his books he appears wrapped in a rough, shaggy gown; to this Jonson alludes. Kelly is mentioned, Act iv., Sc. 1, and Gifford has an interesting note on his career.

Abel has another thing he would impart. Hard by him is lodged a rich young widow, Dame Pliant, but nineteen at the most, to whom he now and then gives a fucus, and sometimes physic, in return for which she trusts him with all her mind. She has come up to town to learn the fashion, and she strangely longs to know her fortune. His worship the doctor is, of course, the very one wise man who can tell it; and Face hints that Nab may win her.

*Drug.* No, sir, she'll never marry  
Under a knight: her brother has made a vow.

*Face.* What! and dost thou despair, my little Nab,  
Knowing what the doctor has set down for thee,  
And seeing so many of the city dubbed?  
. . . what's her brother, a knight?

*Drug.* No, sir, a gentleman newly warm in his land, sir,  
Scarce cold in his one-and-twenty, that does govern  
His sister here; and is a man himself  
Of some three thousand a year, and is come up  
To learn to quarrel, and to live by his wits,  
And will go down again, and die in the country.

*Face.* How ! to quarrel ?

*Drug.* Yes, sir, to carry quarrels,  
As gallants do ; to manage them by line.

*Face.* 'Slid, Nab, the doctor is the only man  
In Christendom for him. He has made a table,  
With mathematical demonstrations,  
Touching the art of quarrels : he will give him  
An instrument to quarrel by. Go, bring them both,  
Him and his sister. And, for thee, with her  
The doctor happ'ly may persuade. Go to :  
'Shalt give his worship a new damask suit  
Upon the premises.

*Sub.* O, good captain !

*Face.* He shall ;  
He is the honestest fellow, doctor. Stay not,  
No offers ; bring the damask, and the parties.

*Drug.* I'll try my power, sir.

*Face.* And thy will, too, Nab.

*Sub.* 'Tis good tobacco, this ! What is't an ounce ?

*Face.* He'll send you a pound, doctor.

*Sub.* O, no.

*Face.* He will do't.

It is the goodest soul ! Abel, about it !  
Thou shalt know more anon. Away, be gone. [*Exit ABEL.*]  
A miserable rogue, and lives with cheese,  
And has the worms. That was the cause, indeed,  
Why he came now : he dealt with me in private,  
To get a med'cine for them.

*Sub.* And shall, sir. This works.

*Face.* A wife, a wife for one of us, my dear Subtle !  
We'll e'en draw lots. . . .

*Sub.* Faith, best let's see her first, and then determine.

*Face.* Content : but Dol must have no breath on't.

*Sub.* Mum."

Two things in this admirable part-scene puzzle my ignorance : first, Why does Kastil (*Kestrel*, a worthless, degenerate hawk ; hence, a mean, dastardly fellow), the angry boy, Dame Pliant's brother, want to learn to live by his wits, having some three

thousand a year (equal to quite twelve thousand in our days), and meaning to go back to the country? Second, Why does Abel, who is druggist as well as tobacconist and grocer, and who supplies physic, need to consult Face about a medicine for the worms?

In Act iii., Sc. 2, enter Abel, followed by Kastril:—

*“ Face. What, honest Nab!*

*Hast brought the damask?*

*Drug. No, sir; here’s tobacco.*

*Face. ’Tis well done, Nab: thou’lt bring the damask too?*

*Drug. Yes; here’s the gentleman, captain, Master Kastril, I have brought to see the doctor.*

*Face. Where’s the widow?*

*Drug. Sir, as he likes, his sister, he says, shall come.*

*Face. O, is it so? Good time. Is your name Kastril, sir?*

*Kas. Ay, and the best of the Kastrils, I’d be sorry else, By fifteen hundred a year. Where is the doctor?*

*My mad tobacco-boy here tells me of one*

*That can do things: has he any skill?*

*Face. Wherein, sir?*

*Kas. To carry a business, manage a quarrel fairly, Upon fit terms.*

*Face. It seems, sir, you are but young About the town, that can make that a question.*

*Kas. Sir, not so young but I have heard some speech Of the angry boys, and seen them take tobacco; And in his shop; and I can take it too. And I would fain be one of ’em, and go down And practise in the country.”*

What on earth, or under the earth, makes Kastril term poor, quiet, simple Abel “my mad tobacco-boy?” Where is aught wild in *him*, except the superstitious credulity common to his age? Mad Abel Drugger! *mouton enragé*, peaceablest of living

creatures gone rabid, as Carlyle glosses with his immense chuckle! The *angry boys* are called the *terrible boys* in the "Silent Woman," Act i., Sc. 1. Upton quotes from Wilson's "Life of King James": "The king minding his sports, many riotous demeanours crept into the kingdom; divers sects of vicious persons, going under the title of *roaring-boys*, *bravadoes*, *roysters*, &c., commit many insolencies; the streets swarm, night and day, with bloody quarrels, private duels fomented," &c. Gifford adds: "These pestilent miscreants continued under various names to disturb the peace of the capital down to the accession of the present royal family;" but methinks we have read of beating the watchmen or Charlies, and other such gentlemanlike rowdyisms, as occurring long after the royal Germans, with their kin and followers, kindly came for our goot and our goots. All quiet smokers, who have the leisure and take the trouble to read beyond their Bible and the precious leaves of their *Tobacco Plant*, must remember how fiercely Milton denounced those sons of Belial, and how Swift tomahawked the Mohawks. How bumptious is Kastril, because he, too, can take tobacco! In our age he would have smoked when ten years younger. Gifford says: "It has been already mentioned [see preceding Section] that Abel's shop was frequented by the adept as well as the tyro in the mystery of 'taking tobacco.' Here the latter was duly qualified for his appearance at ordinaries, taverns, and other places of fashionable resort. Here he practised the 'Cuban *ebolitio*, the euripus, the whiffe,' and many other modes of suppressing or emitting smoke with the requisite grace,

under Cavalier Shift and other eminent masters, whose names have not reached the present times—*carent quia vate sacro.*" The dialogue proceeds ; Face, as the eminently disinterested friend of truth, extolling the little less than omniscience and omnipotence of the doctor with such effect that we read :—

" *Kas.* Pray thee, tobacco-boy, go fetch my suster ;  
I'll see this learned boy before I go ;  
And so shall she.

*Face.* Sir, he is busy now ;  
But if you have a sister to fetch hither,  
Perhaps your own pains may command her sooner ;  
And he by that time may be free.

*Kas.* I go. [Exit.

*Face.* Drugger, she's thine : the damask !  
[Exit ABEL.] Subtle and I  
Must wrestle for her. [Aside.]"

Surly, disguised as a wealthy Spanish Don ignorant of English, penetrates into the house to expose the cheaters, and has the opportunity of telling Dame Pliant, whom he hopes to win for himself, into what hands she has fallen, 'mongst what a nest of villains. Discovering himself when Subtle enters, he jeers and strikes down that venerable doctor ; and when Subtle cries, " Help ! Murder ! " retorts balefully :—

" There's no such thing intended : a good cart  
And a clean whip shall ease you of that fear."

Face comes at the cry ; sees how matters stand, slips out, and returns with Kastril :—

" *Face.* Why, now's the time, if ever you will quarrel  
Well, as they say, and be a true-born child :  
The doctor and your sister both are abused.

*Kas.* Where is he? Which is he? He is a slave,  
Whate'er he is, and the son of a whore. Are you  
The man, sir, I would know?

*Sur.* I should be loth, sir,  
To confess so much.

*Kas.* Then you lie in your throat.

*Sur.* How!

*Face.* [To KASTRIL.] A very errant rogue, sir, and a cheater,  
Employed here by another conjuror  
That does not love the doctor, and would cross him  
If he knew how.

*Sur.* Sir, you are abused.

*Kas.* You lie :  
And 'tis no matter.

*Enter DRUGGER with a piece of damask.*

*Face.* Nay, here's an honest fellow, too, that knows him,  
And all his tricks. Make good what I say, Abel,  
This cheater would have cozened thee o' the widow.

[*Aside to DRUGGER.*

He owes this honest Drugger here seven pound,  
He has had on him in twopenny'orths of tobacco.

*Drug.* Yes, sir.

And he has dammed himself three terms to pay me.

*Face.* And what does he owe for lotium?

*Drug.* Thirty shillings, sir ;  
And for six syringes.

*Sur.* Hydra of villainy !

*Face.* [To KASTRIL.] Nay sir, you must quarrel him out o' the  
house.

*Kas.* I will :

Sir, if you get not out o' doors, you lie ;  
And you are a pimp.

*Sur.* Why, this is madness, sir,  
Not valour in you ; I must laugh at this.

*Kas.* It is my humour : you are a pimp and a trig,  
And an *Amadis de Gaul*, or a Don Quixote.

*Drug.* Or a knight o' the curious coxcomb, do you see?"

Drugger himself, we see, grows witty at the expense  
of his rival ; as for his fibbing against him, all is fair



in love and war. It will be remarked that Kastril has not yet mastered the nice gradations of the gentlemanly quarrel, and can but blurt out grossly at the very beginning, "*You lie*," which should be the climax. It will also be remarked that his munition of invective is neither abundant nor formidable. For the sake of his sister, Surly does not want to quarrel with him, but sees clearly through his vapouring, and tells him that he is valiant in company; for all present—save Dame Pliant, always passively neutral—are dead against the gamester, who for once is playing an honest game. Even Ananias, entering, has his zeal mightily kindled against Surly's Spanish slops:—

*Ana.* They are profane,  
Lewd, superstitious, and idolatrous breeches.  
*Sur.* New rascals!  
*Kas.* Will you be gone, sir?  
*Ana.* Avoid, Sathan!  
Thou art not of the light! That ruff of pride  
About thy neck, betrays thee; and is the same  
With that which the unclean birds, in seventy-seven,  
Were seen to prank it with on divers coasts:  
Thou look'st like antichrist in that lewd hat.  
*Sur.* I must give way——"

The "unclean birds of seventy-seven" may refer to the number of Spanish troops poured about that year, 1577, into the Netherlands under Alva. During the early part of James's reign Spanish influence and fashions were paramount at court; but the people remembered the Armada, and loved not Pope or Inquisition, and always welcomed any stage ridicule of their old enemies. The huge Spanish ruffs, with their deep sets or plaits, often came in for mockery;

and in the present piece, Act iv., Sc. 1, Subtle exclaims, when Surly first enters disguised—

“ He looks in that deep ruff like a head in a platter  
Served in by a short cloak upon two trestles.”

Surly being at length got rid of for the time, Face and Drugger are left on one side, Subtle and Ananias on the other :—

“ *Face.* Drugger, this rogue prevented us, for thee :  
We had determined that thou should'st have come  
In a Spanish suit, and have carried her so ; and he,  
A brokerly slave ! goes, puts it on himself.  
Hast brought the damask ?

*Drug.* Yes, sir.

*Face.* Thou must borrow

A Spanish suit : hast thou no credit with the players ?

*Drug.* Yes, sir ; did you never see me play the Fool ?

*Face.* I know not, Nab ; thou shalt, if I can help it. [*Aside.*  
Hieronimo's old cloak, ruff, and hat will serve ;  
I'll tell thee more when thou bringest 'em. [*Exit DRUGGER.*”

Old Hieronimo, or Jeronymo, was the title-hero of a popular play by Kyd, and of its sequel, the “Spanish Tragedy,” frequently burlesqued by our poet and his contemporaries, though Jonson himself in his early hack days earned a small sum by writing additions to it.

We are now at the close of the Fourth Act, and the beginning of the *denouement*. Lovewit, the master of the house, suddenly returns, and is descried by Dol, with forty of the neighbours about him talking. Face, the man of action, immediately assumes command in the confederacy :—

“ *Face.* Be silent : not a word, if he call or knock.  
I'll into mine old shape again and meet him,

Of Jeremy, the butler. In the meantime,  
 Do you two pack up all the goods and purchase,\*  
 That we can carry in two trunks. I'll keep him  
 Off for to-day, if I cannot longer : and then  
 At night I'll ship you both away to Ratcliff,  
 Where we will meet to-morrow, and there we'll share.  
 Let Mammon's brass and pewter keep the cellar ;  
 We'll have another time for that. But, Dol,  
 Prithee go heat a little water quickly ;  
 Subtle must shave me : all my captain's beard  
 Must off, to make me appear smooth Jeremy."

The neighbours tell Lovewit of the strange persons who have been flocking to his house, day and night, for weeks past, during which Jeremy has not been seen. Jeremy appears, and maintains that the house has been shut up and the keys in his pocket for the last three weeks, and that the neighbours must have had visions or been demented. These worthies waver before his assurance. Then the dupes come up, undeceived and raging ; Mammon and Surly, Kastril for his sister (who is awaiting the genuine Spanish Don she has been promised for husband), Ananias and Tribulation Wholesome ; Dapper cries out from within, and Subtle shouts to quieten him ; Lovewit overhears Face rebuking the latter for his noise ; and finally Face, seeing that he is caught, and feeling that "nothing's more wretched than a guilty conscience" (when the guilt's found out), offers to confess in private :—

\* Whalley notes : "A cant term for goods stolen or dishonestly come by : thus Shakespeare, *Henry V.*—

'They will steal anything, and call it purchase.'

And this sense seems to be derived from Chaucer, who thus uses it in his 'Prophecy' :—

'And robbery is holde purchase.' "

"Give me but leave to make the best of my fortune,  
And only pardon me the abuse of your house :  
It's all I beg. I'll help you to a widow,  
In recompense, that you shall give me thanks for,  
Will make you seven years younger, and a rich one.  
'Tis but your putting on a Spanish cloak :  
I have her within."

Drugger returns with Hieronimo's cloak, hat, and ruff; Face tells Subtle to take the suit, and bid him fetch a parson presently: "Say he shall marry the widow." Face goes off with the things to his master; but Subtle thinks that he means to don the Don himself and marry Dame Pliant, and so informs Dol, who exclaims, "'Tis direct against our articles." Subtle plans with her to get off with the plunder to Brentford instead of Ratcliff, and leave Face in the lurch, Dol beforehand getting what she can from the widow. Nab returns with the parson, and is sent back again to wash himself. Face re-enters, and finds that all the *purchase* is safely packed up, money and goods, including poor Abel's damask and tobacco :—

*Face.* Give me the keys.

*Dol.* Why you the keys?

*Sub.* No matter, Dol; because

We shall not open them before he comes.

*Face.* 'Tis true, you shall not open them, indeed;

Nor have them forth, do you see? not forth, Dol.

*Dol.* No!

*Face.* No, my smock-rampant. The right is, my master Knows all, has pardoned me, and he will keep them; Doctor, 'tis true—you look [astonished]—for all your figures: I sent for him, indeed.\* Wherefore, good partners,

\* A falsehood, to frighten them.

Both he and she be satisfied ; for here  
Determines the indenture tripartite  
'Twixt Subtle, Dol, and Face. All I can do  
Is to help you over the wall, o' the back-side,  
Or lend you a sheet to save your velvet gown, Dol.  
Here will be officers presently, bethink you  
Of some course sudden to 'scape the dock :  
For thither you will come else. [*Loud knocking.*] Hark you,  
thunder."

They curse him, he mocks ; and they have to decamp without bag or baggage. Lovewit in the Spanish dress has been married off-hand to Dame Pliant. Mammon, Surly, Kastril, Ananias, Tribulation return with officers, and are admitted when Lovewit has cast off his disguise. He lets them know who he is, and explains that his servant, taking advantage of his absence, had let the house to a doctor and a captain, of whom he knows nothing. He had found only a gentlewoman within, whom he had married, because her Spanish count had neglected her. They search the house in vain. Mammon, who says that he has been cheated of eight score and ten pounds within these five weeks,\* besides his first materials, demands at least his brass and pewter vessels, which he had sent to be turned into gold. Lovewit will not give these up unless Mammon can bring certificate that he was gulled of them. Mammon will rather lose them than so expose his folly, and retires with Surly, who bitterly regrets that, in not securing the widow when she was in his power, he must needs cheat

\* Yet at the opening of Act ii. he says that they had been at the work ten months. But if so, how could Subtle and Dol have been brought so low (Act i., Sc. 1), when Face took them into the house but some weeks before (Act v., Sc. 1)?

himself, "with that same foolish vice of honesty." Ananias and Tribulation come to rescue the same things, which they have bought of Subtle for a hundred marks, as orphans' goods, and left with him for transmutation: Lovewit threatens to cudgel them out of the house, and they depart with anathema maranatha. Our Druggier comes, and is beaten out again. Kastil enters, dragging in his sister, and rating her in that refined style which was conserved by those staunchest of Conservatives, the country gentlemen, even till the time of Fielding and Squire Western. Lovewit confronts the puerile bully:—

"*Love.* Come, will you quarrel? I will feize [chastise] you, sirrah;

Why do you not buckle to your tools?

*Kas.* Od's light,

This is a fine old boy as e'er I saw!

*Love.* What, do you change your copy now? proceed,  
Here stands my dove: stoop at her if you dare.

*Kas.* 'Slight, I must love him! I cannot choose, i' faith,  
An' I should be hanged for't! Suster, I protest,  
I honour thee for this match.

*Love.* O, do you so, sir?

*Kas.* Yes, an' thou canst take tobacco and drink, old boy,  
I'll give her five hundred pound more to her marriage,  
Than her own state.

*Love.* Fill a pipe full, Jeremy.

*Face.* Yes; but go in and take it, sir.

*Love.* We will;

I will be ruled by thee in everything, Jeremy.

*Kas.* 'Slight, thou art not hide-bound, thou art a jovy boy!  
Come, let us in, I pray thee, and take our whiffs."

Thus tobacco is vindicated at the close of the comedy, as, like your If, a great peace-maker. Oh that rich region of comedy! Oh our poor work-a-day

world! How many of us love wit, and can take tobacco and drink; but who will therefore give us two thousand pounds? Echo answers, 'Ounds!

*P.S.*—SHAKESPEARE AND SNUFF.—At the close of Section x., I promised to return to this subject, anent a note of Gifford. Consulting the "Complete Concordance to Shakespeare," New and Revised Edition, by Mrs. Mary Cowden Clarke (London: W. Kent and Co., 1874), I find only the following references to snuff and snuffing:—

*Midsummer Night's Dream*, v. 1, 254.—"It is already in snuff."

*Love's Labour's Lost*, v. 2, 22.—"The light, by taking it in snuff."

*All's Well that Ends Well*, i. 2, 59.—"To be the snuff of younger spirits."

1 *Henry IV.*, i. 3, 41.—"Took it in snuff; and still he smiled."

*Henry VIII.*, iii. 2, 96.—"'Tis I must snuff it; then out it goes."

*Cymbeline*, i. 6, 87.—"And solace i' the dungeon by a snuff?"

*King Lear*, iii. 1, 26.—"In snuffs and packings of the dukes."

*King Lear*, iv. 6, 39.—"My snuff, and loathed part of nature."

*Hamlet*, iv. 7, 116.—"A kind of wick, or snuff, that will."

*Love's Labour's Lost*, iii. 1, 16.—"Snuffed up love by smelling love."

The numbers of the lines I have added from the Globe edition. Now, if the reader interested in this great question will look up the passages referred to, I think he will agree with me that in only a couple of them—the fourth, from 1 *Henry IV.*, and the last, from *Love's Labour's Lost*, is there any possibility of allusion to the dust of tobacco. And even in these, I am afeared that a very little pondering

will snuff out or puff away this poor possibility. The former is in Hotspur's account of the dainty lord who pestered him after Holmedon fight :—

“ He was perfumèd like a milliner ;  
And 'twixt his finger and his thumb he held  
A pouncet-box, which ever and anon  
He gave his nose and took't away again ;  
Who therewith angry when it next came there,  
Took it in snuff ; —”

A pouncet-box is a box for holding perfume, such as was in use long before the blessed powder of tobacco was known in our hemisphere. “Took it in snuff,” is, indeed, a pun: *to take in snuff*, meaning to take offence, as well as to take by snuffing up. In brief, snuff and snuffing [German, *schnupfen*, “to draw into the nose,” *in die nase ziehen*] were familiar in our language of old, and tobacco-dust and the inhaling thereof were named from them, not *vice versâ*; the general being made specific in honour of the most aromatic, stimulating, brain-clearing, and popular of all the triturated titillants of the olfactory nerves: snuff is *the* snuff, as tobacco *the* weed, and, as in the East, the same word means smoke and tobacco. In French, German, Spanish, and Italian alike, our snuff *par excellence* is distinguished as powder of tobacco, the great word “tobacco” being, with various spellings, common to all. These remarks dispose of the other passage. I am thus compelled to decide against Gifford, and in favour of myself, when I wrote, “Many of the characters (Shakespeare's) are continually taking snuff, but this does not appear to have been supplied by the tobacconist.”



## XIII

In "Bartholomew Fair" (1614) we have a good deal of tobacco in decidedly queer company. Tom Quarlous, the gamester, declares that, rather than marry a rich old Puritanical widow for the sake of her fortune, he would submit to the most terrible tortures and privations; among others: "I would e'en desire of fate, I might dwell in a drum and take in my sustenance with an old broken tobacco-pipe and a straw." Humphrey Waspé, telling of the trouble he has had with his young, rattle-brained master, Bartholomew Cokes, an esquire of Harrow, who has been but a day and a half in town, and is fascinated by every novelty he comes across, gives as the climax: "I thought he would have run mad o' the black boy in Bucklersbury, that takes the scurvy, roguish tobacco there." Entering the Fair, we soon meet, among other estimable characters, Ursula the pig-woman, Mooncalf the tapster, and Nightingale the ballad-monger:—

"*Urs.* Fie upon't: who would wear out their youth and prime thus, in roasting of pigs, that had any cooler vocation? hell's a kind of cold cellar to't, a very fine vault o' my conscience!—What, Mooncalf!

*Moon.* [*Within the booth.*] Here, mistress.

*Urs.* My chair, you false faucet you; and my morning's draught, quickly, a bottle of ale, to quench me, rascal. I am all fire and fat, Nightingale, I shall e'en melt away to the first woman, a rib again, I am afraid. . . . Fill again, you unlucky vermin! . . . a poor vexed thing I am, I feel myself dropping already as fast as I can; two stone of suet a day is my proportion. I can but hold life and soul together with this (here's to you, Nightingale), and a whiff of tobacco at most. Where's my pipe now? not filled! thou arrant incubee.

*Night.* Nay, Ursula, thou'lt gall between the tongue and the teeth, with fretting now.

*Urs.* How can I hope that ever he'll discharge his place of trust, tapster, a man of reckoning under me, that remembers nothing I say to him? [*Exit NIGHT*] but look to't, sirrah, you were best. Threepence a pipe-full, I will have made, of all my whole half-pound of tobacco, and a quarter of a pound of colts-foot mixt with it too, to eke it out? \* I that have dealt so long in the fire, will not be to seek in smoke now. Then six and twenty shillings a barrel I will advance on my beer, and fifty shillings a hundred on my bottle-ale; I have told you the ways how to raise it. Froth your cans well in the filling, at length, rogue, and jog your bottles o' the buttock, sirrah, then skink out the first glass ever, and drink with all companies, though you be sure to be drunk; you'll misreckon the better, and be less ashamed on't. But your true trick, rascal, must be, to be ever busy, and mistake away the bottles and cans, in haste, before they be half drunk off, and never hear anybody call (if they should chance to mark you), till you have brought fresh, and be able to forswear them. Give me a drink of ale."

Another drink of ale she surely deserved, after this pregnant exposition of the esoteric principles of (Bartholomew) fair dealing. Now enters Dan Jordan Knockem, a horse-courser and ranger of Turnbull Street, between whom and Ursula some delicate banter is exchanged:—

"*Knock.* What! my little lean Ursula! my she-bear! art thou alive yet, with thy litter of pigs to grunt out another Bartholomew Fair? ha!

\* To learn how moderate this price was, mark that threepence then was equal to at least a shilling now, and that the ordinary pipe-bowls were very small. See "Tobacco: Its History and Associations," by F. W. Fairholt, F.S.A., for records and illustrative diagrams. Tobacco, indeed, was three shillings an ounce to the father of Sir Philip Sidney (p. 70, ed. 1859); but there were twenty-five pipefuls in the ounce temp. James I. (p. 161).

*Urs.* Yes, and to amble a foot, when the Fair is done, to hear you groan out of a cart up the heavy hill. . . . Well, I shall be meet with your mumbling mouth one day.

*Knock.* What ! thou'lt poison me with a newt in a bottle of ale, wilt thou ? or a spider in a tobacco-pipe, Urse ? Come, there's no malice in these fat folks, I never fear thee, an I can scape thy lean Mooncalf here. Let's drink it out, good Urse, and no vapours ! . . . Thou art such another mad, merry Urse, still ! troth I do make conscience of vexing thee, now in the dog-days, this hot weather, for fear of foundering thee in the body, and melting down a pillar of the Fair. Pray thee take thy chair again, and keep state ; and let's have a fresh bottle of ale, and a pipe of tobacco ; and no vapours. . . . Look, here's Ezekiel Edgworth [*a pickpocket*] ; a fine boy of his inches as any in the Fair ! has still money in his purse, and will pay all, with a kind heart, and good vapours.

*Edg.* That I will indeed, willingly, Master Knockem ; fetch some ale and tobacco."

Nightingale returns, and arranges with Ezekiel, whose confederate he is, and Ursula the tactics for this great field-day. Nightingale will take his stand in the fullest passages, shifting often, and while singing will use his hawk's eye nimbly, and make signs to Ezekiel where the full purses are ; after each assemblage Ezekiel will hand the booty over to Nightingale, who will quickly deposit it with Ursula ; and at night they will meet and share the lot.

"*Urs.* Enough, talk no more on't : your friendship, masters, is not now to begin. Drink your draught of indenture, your sup of covenant, and away : the Fair fills apace, company begins to come in, and I have ne'er a pig ready yet.

*Knock.* Well said ! fill the cups, and light the tobacco ; let's give fire in the works, and noble vapours."

Knockem's *vapour*, like the noble Nym's *humour*, or the *blooming* and *awfully* of our own days, can be

applied in the most various senses or nonsenses ; for the rest, the horse-courser chiefly indulges in stable-slang. Winwife, a gentleman, and Quarlous come on the scene :—

*“Knock.* Master Winwife ! Master Quarlous ! will you take a pipe of tobacco with us ? Do not discredit me now, Zekiel.

[*Edgworth gives him a purse :* Zekiel being used to pay for Dan, and Dan to roar or bully for Zekiel.

*Winw.* Do not see him ; he is the roaring horse-courser, pray thee let's avoid him : turn down this way.

*Quar.* 'Slud, I'll see him, and roar with him too, an' he roared as loud as Neptune ; pray thee go with me. . . .

*Knock.* Welcome, Master Quarlous, and Master Winwife ; will you take any froth and smoke with us ?

*Quar.* Yes, sir ; but you'll pardon us if we knew not of so much familiarity between us afore.

*Knock.* As what, sir ?

*Quar.* To be so lightly invited to smoke and froth.”

The new-comers and Ursula have a sharp set-to with the tongue ; Knockem takes her part, and falls to fist-fighting with Quarlous ; Ursula, who has hurried off for the hot dripping-pan to baste away her antagonists, stumbles with it and scalds her leg, her leg, her leg, her leg ! Adam Overdo, the foolish Justice of the Peace, who has come to the Fair disguised as “mad Arthur of Bradley, that makes the orations,” in order to take note of all the rogueries there abounding, and has been sipping a bottle of ale to cover his watching, and is bamboozled into taking deep interest in the pickpocket, as a clerkly and innocent young man fallen among debauched company, and worthy of rescue—this sapient magistrate moralises :—

*“Over.* These are the fruits of bottle-ale and tobacco ! the foam of the one, and the fumes of the other ! Stay, young man,

and despise not the wisdom of these few hairs that are grown grey in care of thee.

*Edg.* Nightingale, stay a little. Indeed, I'll hear some of this !”

Enter now Dame Overdo his wife, with Grace Wellborn his ward, young Cokes his brother-in-law, who has this day taken out his license to marry Grace, and Coke's masterful man Waspé ; our blind justice proceeds with his moral exhortation :—

“ *Over.* Thirst not after that frothy liquor, ale ; for who knows when he openeth the stopple, what may be in the bottle ? Hath not a snail, a spider, yea, a newt been found there ? [Manifest plagiarism from his excellency Dan Jordan Knockem !] thirst not after it, youth ; thirst not after it.

*Cokes.* This is a brave fellow, Numps [Waspé], let's hear him. . . .

*Over.* Neither do thou lust after that tawney weed tobacco.

*Cokes.* Brave words !

*Over.* Whose complexion is like the Indian's that vents it.

*Cokes.* Are they not brave words, sister ?

*Over.* And who can tell, if before the gathering and making up thereof, the Alligarta hath not pissed thereon ?—The creeping venom of which subtle serpent, as some late writers affirm, neither the cutting of the perilous plant, nor the drying of it, nor the lighting or burning, can anyway persway [mitigate] or assuage.

*Cokes.* Good, i' faith ! is it not, sister ?

*Over.* Hence it is that the lungs of the tobacconist [smoker] are rotted, the liver spotted, the brain smoked like the backside of the pig-woman's booth here, and the whole body within, black as her pan you saw e'en now without.

*Cokes.* A fine similitude that, sir ! did you see the pan ?

*Edg.* Yes, sir.

*Over.* Nay, the hole in the nose here of some tobacco-takers, or the third nostril, if I may so call it, which makes that they can vent the tobacco out, like the ace of clubs, or rather the flower-de-lis, is caused from the tobacco, the mere tobacco !—

*Cokes.* Who would have missed this, sister ?

*Mrs. O.* Not anybody but Numps.

*Cokes.* He does not understand.

*Edg.* [*Picks COKES' pocket of his purse.*] Nor you feel. [*Aside. Gives the purse aside to NIGHT.*] In, to Ursula, Nightingale, and carry her comfort : see it told. This fellow [the reverend Justice !] was sent to us by Fortune, for our first fairing.

[*Exit NIGHT.*]

*Over.* But what speak I of the diseases of the body, children of the Fair ?

*Cokes.* That's to us, sister. Brave, i' faith !

*Over.* Hark, O you sons and daughters of Smithfield ! and hear what malady it doth the mind : it causeth swearing, it causeth swaggering, it causeth snuffling and snarling, and now and then a hurt [appalling climax !].

*Mrs. O.* He hath something of Master Overdo, methinks, brother.

*Cokes.* So methought, sister, very much of my brother Overdo : and 'tis when he speaks.

*Over.* Look into any angle of the town, the Streights or the Bermudas,\* where the quarrelling lesson is read, and how do they entertain the time, but with bottle-ale and tobacco ? The lecturer is o' one side, and his pupils o' the other ; but the seconds are still bottle-ale and tobacco, for which the lecturer reads, and the novices pay. Thirty pound a week in bottle-ale ! forty in tobacco ! and ten more in ale again ! Then for a suit to drink in, so much, and, that being slavered, so much for another suit, and then a third suit, and a fourth suit ! and still the bottle-ale slavereth, and the tobacco stinketh !

*Waspe.* Heart of a madman ! are you rooted here ? will you never away ? what can any man find out in this bawling fellow, to grow here for ? . . .

\* "These *Streights* consisted of a nest of obscure courts, alleys, and avenues, running between the bottom of St. Martin's Lane, Half-moon (now Bedford Street), and Chandos Street. In Justice Overdo's time they were the receptacle of fraudulent debtors, thieves, and prostitutes. . . . At a subsequent period this cluster of avenues exchanged the old name of the *Bermudas* for that of the *Caribee Islands*, which the learned professors of the district corrupted, by a happy allusion to the arts cultivated there, into the *Cribbee Islands*, their present appellation."—Gifford, in 1816.

*Over.* I will conclude briefly—

*Wasp.* Hold your peace, you roaring rascal, I'll run my head in your chaps else."

Thus the enraptured auditor of poor Overdo's oration had his pocket picked of one purse; and before he got out of the Fair the other (for gold, the former being for silver) went too: divine punishment from Diva Nicotina! As for Overdo himself, "the wise justice is in a maze of dupery from the first scene to the last;" naturally enough, with intellects uncleared by tobacco. As Quarlous says when next he sees our magistrate: "Look, here's the poor fool again, that was stung by the Wasp erewhile."

Passing over two or three casual notices of pipes, which merely show that they were among the established favourites of the fair, we come in this same remarkable and busy scene (being the whole of Act iii.), to that most popular character, on the old stage, the "Banbury man," that is to say Puritan, Zeal-of-the-land Busy. This worthy is suitor to Dame Purecraft, a widow, and what may be termed her Stiggins or spiritual director. Her son-in-law, John Littlewit, a proctor, thus speaks of him:—

"... an old elder come from Banbury, a suitor that puts in here at meal tide, to praise the painful brethren, or pray that the sweet singers may be restored; says a grace as long as his breath lasts him! Sometime the spirit is so strong with him, it gets quite out of him, and then my mother, or Win [his wife] are fain to fetch it again with malmsey or aqua cœlestis."

Master Littlewit wanted to go to the Fair because it was the fashion, and yet more because there was to be performed a puppet-play of his own making.

Mistress Win, or Win-the-fight, Littlewit was equally anxious to go, but feared that her mother would never consent to "such a profane motion." Then did this unscrupulous husband suggest unto his wife, who was in an interesting condition, that she should suddenly fall into a violent longing for roast pig, one of the standard delicacies of the Fair; and he even went to the enormity of saying: "Win, long to eat of a pig, sweet Win, in the Fair, do you see, in the heart of the Fair, not at Pyecorner!" With admirable wifely submission, all unconscious of evil, this sweet Griselda, this long-suffering Win-the-fight, did then and there commence to long so terribly for roast pig, and for pig, too, in the very heart of the fair; that her pious mother was constrained to consult her confessor, whether in such a critical case it would not be lawful to sanction a venture even among the tents of the wicked in the Fair. Littlewit found Zeal-of-the-land Busy zealously and busily and profitably employed: "fast by the teeth in the cold turkey-pie in the cupboard, with a great white loaf on his left hand, and a glass of malmsey on his right." The saint, after arguing with fine subtlety the subtle point of casuistry, graciously sanctioned the expedition, and agreed to take part in it himself. And this is the way in which he came to commune for a time with that sinner Knockem:—

"*Knock.* Sir, I will take your counsel, and cut my hair, and leave vapours; I see that tobacco, and bottle-ale, and pig, and Whit [*a Captain, with a finely forcible appellative in the 'Dramatis Personæ'*], and very Ursula herself is all vanity.

*Busy.* Only pig was not comprehended in my admonition, the rest were: for long hair, it is an ensign of pride, a banner; and the world is full of these banners, very full of banners. And



bottle-ale is a drink of Satan's, a diet-drink of Satan's, devised to puff us up and make us swell in this latter age of vanity ; as the smoke of tobacco to keep us in mist and error : but the fleshly woman, which you call Ursula, is above all to be avoided, having the marks upon her of the three enemies of man : the world, as being in the Fair ; the devil, as being in the fire ; and the flesh, as being herself. . . .

[*Goes forward.*

*Knock.* An excellent right hypocrite ! Now his belly is full, he falls a railing and kicking, the jade. A very good vapour ! I'll in, and joy Ursula, with telling her how her pig works ; two and a half he eat to his share [*Let us mercifully hope, portions, not pigs !*] ; and he has drunk a pail-full. He eats with his eyes, as well as his teeth."

No comment is needed on this ; and certainly none on Busy, of whom it may be simply further reported that when Lanthorn Leatherhead, the hobby-horse seller or toyman, seeks to tempt the party with a drum, among other things, his pious zeal flameth out full fiercely :—

"It is the broken belly of the beast, and thy bellows there are his lungs, and these pipes are his throat, those feathers are of his tail, and thy rattles the gnashing of his teeth."

Pipes must have been pretty popular with the low as with the high, when a Bartholomew Fair toyman, as a matter of course, kept them in stock.

There is one more passage worth quoting anent the customs of the stage, already dwelt on in Section ix. Cokes the volatile of course visits the puppet-show, whereof Master Littlewit is the dramatist, and asks :—

"Have you none of your pretty impudent boys now, to bring stools, fill tobacco, fetch ale, and beg money, as they have at other houses ?"

And now we must bid farewell to this vigorous and multifarious comedy, abounding in the keenest observation and humour, leaving the ultimate destinies of the principal characters in the day's proceedings at the fair to be learnt from the play itself, which ranks only just below

"The 'Fox,' the 'Alchemist,' and 'Silent Woman,'  
Done by Ben Jonson, and outdone by no man."

Yet one word more, in the interest of our friend Zeal-of-the-land. In the epilogue to "Tartuffe," by Lord Buckhurst, may be read:—

"Many have been the vain attempts of wit  
Against the still-prevailing hypocrit:  
Once, and but once, a poet got the day,  
And vanquished Busy in a puppet-play!  
But Busy rallying, filled with holy rage,  
Possessed the pulpit, and pulled down the stage."

#### XIV

In the renowned Bobadill, the noble Cavalier Shift, Brisk the Fastidious, honest Abel Drugger, and the worthies we have just left in Bartholomew Fair, we have Jonson's chief tobacco heroes; and in connection with them is the bulk of what he has to say concerning the "sovereign herb," so that it now remains for me but to gather up the fragments that are left, omitting the very small crumbs.

In "The Devil is an Ass" (1616), Satan, warning the poor imp Pug, who burns to try his mischief on earth, that he will now find men further advanced

in vice than himself, instances among many other things :—

“Carmen

Are got into the yellow starch, and chimney-sweepers  
To their tobacco, and strong waters, Hum,  
Meath, and Obarni.”

The former instance is merely absurd, not vicious ; as for the latter, if a fact, the poor chimney-sweepers were to be sincerely felicitated. So Barnaby Rich, in his “Honestie of this Age,” published two years earlier (1614), as cited by Fairholt (p. 75, ed. 1859) : ‘There is not so base a groome that comes into an ale-house to call for his pott, but he must have his pipe of tobacco ; for it is a commodity that is nowe as vendible in every taverne, wine, and ale-house, as eyther wine, ale, or beare ; and for apothecaries’ shops, grocers’ shops, chandlers’ shops, they are (almost) never without company, that from morning till night are still taking of tobacco. What a number are there besides, that doe keepe houses, set open shoppes, that have no other trade to live by, but by the selling of tobacco.” The only other mention in this play goes to confirm the first. Fitzdottrel is pretending to be bewitched, gnashing, foaming (with soap), and raving, Sir Paul Eitherside, a lawyer and justice, with others, watching him. One asks, “What does he now, sir ?”—

“*Sir P. E. Shew*

The taking of tobacco, with which the devil  
Is so delighted.

*Fitz. Hum !*

*Sir P. E.* And calls for hum.

You takers of strong waters and tobacco,  
Mark this.”

This is the second foolish justice we have had condemning tobacco. The censure of some people is the best praise they can give, and the weed is truly honoured when denounced by the devil himself, who is the Father of Lies, and by a lawyer whose name is Eitherside, and who is so poor at that, as our cousins have it, that he is solemnly taken in by a very gull counterfeiting demoniac possession.

The Induction to the "Staple of News" (1625, æt. 52) introduces us to the poet in person, "rolling himself up and down like a tun." There is no allusion to tobacco worth remarking in this comedy, but one of Gifford's notes has both a nicotian and a Jonsonian interest. Several of the characters, including ladies, dine together in the renowned Apollo of the Devil Tavern, "at brave Dick Wadloe's," the convivial throne-room or royal banqueting-hall of rare old Ben and his courtly club, he being perpetual Chairman or President. Gifford observes: "From the manner in which Marmion (an enthusiastic admirer of Jonson) speaks of his entertainment there, it may be safely concluded that an admission to it was a favour of no ordinary kind." He then quotes the following brave passage from Marmion's "Fine Companion," remarking that "the boon Delphic god" was our poet himself:—

*Careless.* I am full  
Of oracles, I am come from Apollo—  
*Emilia.* From Apollo!  
*Careless.* From the heaven  
Of my delight, where the boon Delphic god  
Drinks sack and keeps his Bacchanalia,  
And has his incense, and his altars smoking,  
And speaks in sparkling prophecies; thence I come,

*My brains perfumed with the rich Indian vapour,*  
 And heightened with conceits. From tempting beauties,  
 From dainty music, and poetic strains,  
 From bowls of nectar, and ambrosiac dishes,  
 From witty varlets, fine companions,  
 And from a mighty continent of pleasure,  
 Sails thy brave Careless."

Among the extravagant intelligence furnished to the "Staple of News" there is actually an anticipation of the fish-torpedo!

"They write here, one Cornelius-Son,  
 Hath made the Hollanders an invisible eel  
 To swim the haven at Dunkirk, and sink all  
 The shipping there."

It has been more or less facetiously remarked that Shakespeare's first gravedigger must have had queer notions of economy when he assured Hamlet, "A tanner will last you nine year." In Act v., Sc. 2 of this play there is an exquisite dissertation, overlong to quote now, by a miserly usurer, on the enormity of wasting sixpence but once a year.

In the "New Inn," whose absurd plot is redeemed for the reader by some excellent writing, the lady who for long years incredibly counterfeits a drunken Irish nurse, says of one of the guests:—

"He tauk so desperate and so debaught,  
 So boudy like a courtier and a lord,  
 God bless him, one that tak'th tobacco."

And in the rude revelry of the "militia below stairs," Jordan the chamberlain is dubbed, "Lieutenant of the ordnance, tobacco and pipes."

The "Magnetic Lady; or, Humours Reconciled"

(1632), has, I believe, but a single mention of tobacco. At the close of Act iii., *Damplay*, one of the critical chorus, which Ben was fond of introducing, replies to his companion and contrast, *Probee* :—

“I care not for marking the play ; I’ll damn it, talk, and do that I come for. I will not have gentlemen lose their privilege, nor I myself my prerogative, for never an overgrown or superannuated poet of them all. He shall not give me the law : I will censure and be witty, and take my tobacco, and enjoy my *Magna Charta* of reprehension, as my predecessors have done before me.”

There are several interesting allusions in this play to the poet himself and his earlier works. Being then in his sixtieth year, he indulged in the retrospection and expansiveness of age. In the *Induction*, the *Boy of the House* (*Black Friars*), who is the third member of the chorus, says—

“The author beginning his studies of this kind with ‘Every Man in his Humour ;’ and after, ‘Every Man out of his Humour ;’ and since continuing in all his plays, especially those of the comic thread, whereof the ‘New Inn’ was the last, some recent humours still, or manners of men, that went along with the times ; finding himself now near the close, or shutting up, of his circle, hath fancied to himself in idea this ‘Magnetic Mistress’ . . . to draw thither a diversity of guests, all persons of different humours, to make up his perimeter. And this he hath called ‘Humours Reconciled.’”

No better definition of the leading idea of the greater part of his comedies could be given than is thus furnished by old Ben himself, who always knew as thoroughly what he meant to do as how to do it, composing not by impulse, but with settled purpose and plan.

When the nature of Parson Palate has been expounded by Master Compass in rhyme (as Tennyson, in one of his later poems, expounds that of the unctuous hypocrite and swindler who ever slimed his victims ere he gorged), his brother, Captain Ironside, asks, "Who made this Epigram, you?" and Compass replies, "No, a great clerk As any of his bulk, Ben Jonson made it" (Act i., Sc. 1). In the interlude of the chorus between Acts i. and ii., Probee asks the Boy, who has spoken of "any velvet lethargy in the house," a phrase whose import actors will keenly appreciate :—

"Why do you maintain your poet's quarrel so with velvet and good clothes, boy? we have seen him in indifferent good clothes ere now."

*Boy.* Ay, and may do in better, if it please the king his master to say Amen to it, and allow it, to whom he acknowledgeth all. But his clothes shall never be the best part about him though; he will have somewhat beside either of human letters, or severe honesty, shall speak him a man, though he went naked."

We remark likewise his old self-assertion, and his disdain for the mob, whether rich or poor, high or low. Thus in the Induction he says of himself, through the mouth of the Boy:

"He will not woo the gentile ignorance so much. But careless of all vulgar censure, as not depending on common approbation, he is confident it shall super-please judicious spectators, and to them he leaves it to work with the rest, by example or otherwise."

But Jonson was never quite so haughty and contemptuous as his friend and fellow "gnomic poet" and dramatist, about fifteen years before him in life, only three in

death, George Chapman. Our fiery and dauntless translator of Homer thus ends the dedication of the first of his poems, "The Shadow of Night" (1594, æt. 35-6): "So preferring thy allowance in this poor and strange trifle, to the passport of a whole City of others, I rest as resolute as Seneca, satisfying myself if but a few, if one, or if none like it." And as a postscript to the "Gloss" on the first of his two hymns, he writes: "For the rest of his own invention, figures and similes, touching their aptness and novelty, he hath not laboured to justify them, because he hopes they will be proved enough to justify themselves, and prove sufficiently authentical to such as understand them; for the rest, God help them [for the poet evidently will not, interjects Mr. Swinburne in citing this passage], I cannot do as others, make day seem a lighter woman than she is, by painting her." Again, in his dedication of "Ovid's Banquet of Sense" (1595) to the same "truly learned and very worthy Friend" Master Matthew Roydon, he declares: "The profane multitude I hate, and only consecrate my strange poems to those searching spirits, whom learning hath made noble, and nobility sacred." See also the dedications of the tragedies, "The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois," and "Cæsar and Pompey." \*

\* I remarked in the second of these papers that Gifford quite loses his head and foams at the mouth when the monarchy or Church is in question. Jonson's Puritans in the "Alchemist" and "Bartholomew Fair" made fine targets for virulent invective; but a note to this drama is about as good a brief specimen of his ravings in one of these paroxysms as I remember. Bias, a vi-politic, or sub-secretary, says (Act iii., Sc. 4)——

"Sir, the corruption of one thing in nature  
Is held the generation of another——"



"A Tale of a Tub" (1633) should be especially interesting to all North Londoners, the scene being Finsbury Hundred, and the *dramatis personæ* belonging to Pancras, Totten-Court, Maribone, Kentish-town, Kilborn, Islington, Hamstead, Chalcot; the which places, together with Canonbury, Tyburn (already a scene of dire suspense), Highgate, Paddington, are spoken of as "all the towns about here." One of the characters says, "to Kentish Town we are got at length"—riding from Totten(ham) Court! St. John's Wood was so truly a wood that daylight brigandage could be plausibly located in its corner, a mile west through the fields from the town of Pancras; and so with the

This theory of equivocal generation had passed out of fashion before Gifford's time (see one of his notes on "Alchemist," ii. 1, vol. ii. p. 27), but he could not contain himself. Thus he burst out: "There is nothing new under the sun! This is precisely the principle on which that great philosopher Dr. Darwin [really scientific versifier of the "Loves of the Plants," grandfather of our great author of the "Origin of Species"], and those humane admirers of the French Revolution *up to a certain point*, Price, Priestley, &c., justified their exultation at the wholesale murder of princes and peers by a *regenerative cry* of hell-hounds. The corruption of one dead king would produce a thousand worms, whose happiness, taken in the aggregate, would surpass that of the individual, and consequently prove a clear gain on the score of humanity; while the summary extermination of a perverse generation of priests and nobles, though not quite agreeable to the victims themselves, would be more than compensated to the universe in a few centuries by prodigious advances towards perfectibility, in a more tractable and philosophic race of atheists and murderers."

How long are the pages of Jonson to be defiled by such rabid and venomous slaver? Gifford, the editor and scholiast, commands our admiration and gratitude; but the sooner Gifford the High Church and State man ("high as venison is high") is ejected from the society of our brave old poet the better: there is surely quite enough of him and his fellows in this kind in his own *Quarterly* for even the most determined followers of Mithridates, who "fed on poisons till they were become a sort of nutriment."

cross-ways over the country between Kentish Town and Hamstead Heath. The nominal time seems to be early in the reign of Elizabeth, as one says he beheld "King Edward, our late liege and sovereign lord," ride forth in state ; but the author probably wrote in accordance with his own time and experience. Most of the personages are uneducated ; and, strangely enough, these all speak in a sort of West Country dialect, thus :—

"Why, 'tis thirty years, e'en as this day now,  
Zin Valentine's Day, of all days kursined, look you ;  
And the zame day o' the month as this Zin Valentine,  
Or I am vowly deceived."

The woman of my Lady Tub, of Totten Hall, speaks of the city ladies and court ladies as if the capital were far remote. Strangely enough, moreover, we read of the new year in January, though for a considerable period after Jonson's time the old year did not end until Lady-day. Further, Hilts says to the intended bride, referring to the intended bridegroom, poor Clay, the tile-maker, who is sorely diddled :—

"it's true, you are a proper woman ;  
But to be cast away on such a clown-pipe  
As Clay !"

which, if an anachronism, appears to imply that in Jonson's days (the earlier, if not the latter) clay pipes were left to the lower classes. The comedy, or comedy-farce, is full of genial fun, and I should think would prove popular even now on the stage, if fairly acted. The author himself says of it in the Prologue :—

“But acts of clowns and constables to-day  
Stuff out the scenes of our ridiculous play.

We bring you now, to show what different things  
The cotes of clowns are from the courts of kings.”

It gladdens us to find our big Ben, at threescore, laughing such kindly and jolly laughter.

Lastly, for the comedies, we come to “The Case is Altered,” which, however, ought probably to have been placed second or third, as it appears to have been written in 1599. The style has a freedom and ease which are somewhat deficient in his later dramas; both form and substance come nearer to those of his best contemporaries; romance and passion are not slain outright by the keen, cold, intellectual analysis of humours and affectations and charlatanisms. On the whole, I am inclined to regret with Gifford that Jonson “did not rather labour to perfect his early style than to exchange it altogether for that more severe and masculine mode of composition which he subsequently adopted.” The miser, Jaques de Prie, rich with stolen wealth, who acts the beggar for its greater security, is drawn with much power and humour: his doting ecstasies over his hidden hoard of golden crowns, his anxious suspicions that every one coming to his house must have discovered his secret, his transport of agony when he finds that his treasure has been stolen from him in turn are true to the life in an ante-banknote miser. (But surely Peter Onion and Juniper, the cobbler, must have had some difficulty in walking off impromptu with the bulk and weight of thirty thousand golden crowns!) In Charles Lamb’s note

anent this play, in the "Specimens," he says, with his usual rich appreciation :—

"The old poets, when they introduce a miser, make him address his gold as his mistress ; as something to be seen, felt, and hugged ; as capable of satisfying two of the senses at least. The substitution of a thin, unsatisfying medium in the place of the good old tangible metal has made avarice quite a Platonic affection in comparison with the seeing, touching, and handling pleasures of the old Chrysophilites. A banknote can no more satisfy the touch of a true sensualist in this passion than Creusa could return her husband's embrace in the shades. See the 'Cave of Mammon,' in Spenser ; Barabas's contemplation of his wealth, in the 'Rich Jew of Malta' [Marlowe] ; Luke's raptures in the 'City Madam' [Massinger] ; the idolatry and absolute gold-worship of the miser Jaques in this early comic production of Ben Jonson's. Above all, hear Guzman, in that excellent old translation of the 'Spanish Rogue,' expatiate on the 'ruddy cheeks of your golden ruddocks, your Spanish pistolets, your plump and full-faced Portuguese, and your clear-skinned pieces of eight of Castile,' which he and his fellows the beggars kept secret to themselves, and did privately enjoy in a plentiful manner. 'For to have them to pay them away is not to enjoy them ; to enjoy them is to have them lying by us, having no other need of them than to use them for the clearing of the eyesight and the comforting of our senses. These we did carry about with us, sewing them in some patches of our doublets near unto the heart, and as close to the skin as we could handsomely quilt them in, holding them to be restorative.'"

But our most exquisite and genial of critics has nearly made me disremember his "Plant divine, of rarest virtue," for whose sake he was ready to do anything but die. It is only once mentioned (Act ii., Sc. 3). Aurelia the sprightly rallies her melancholy sister, Phoenixella—

"Sister, i' faith you take too much tobacco,  
It makes you black within as you are without.  
What, true-stitch, sister ! both your sides alike !"

Jonson was then but green in judgment, and, perhaps, had not yet mastered the great art of smoking, so we will excuse him for fancying that the great plant tends to mournfulness instead of serenity. We find a certain artlessness of youth—the youth both of the dramatist and the drama at the close of the sixteenth century—in the way in which the catastrophe is hurried and huddled. Paulo Firenze, after a short burst of indignation, pardons off-hand his false friend Angelo, who had abducted Paulo's true love, confided to his care. The tablet which identifies Gaspar as Camillo is ready at a moment's notice, Chamont having carried it about him for years, conserving it secret from his bosom friend Gaspar himself.

Tobacco is mentioned but two or three times in the masques, most significantly in that of the "Metamorphosed Gipsies," thrice presented to King James, 1621, of which the MS. in the author's own writing is preserved, a good fortune shared by no other of his compositions. It is very clever, graceful, and courtier-like; but we are sorry to say that, to please the counterblasting king, our poet descends to vilify tobacco. The first mention occurs in the long famous and popular song, "Cocklorel would needs have the devil his guest." The tobacco stanzas are the last three, and are not in the MS., so they must have been tacked on specially for "Solomon, the son of David." Afterwards the Patrico jingles about it in the same strain, using the same metaphor, and giving it the same accompaniments, being those of the well-known story: "Three things to which James had a dislike, and with which, he said, he would

treat the devil were he to invite him to a dinner, were a pig, a poll of ling with mustard, and a pipe of tobacco for digesture." I wonder with what the devil has treated him since inviting him to dinner! Well, the indignation of Diva Nicotina confounded Jonson in these acts of servile hypocrisy, so alien from his stout, honest character—the first lines are doggrel, and the others mere patter, both destitute alike of wit and humour; and the metaphor with which the herb of herbs and its censer are associated, is so coarse that I dare not reproduce the verses in these our dainty days. A righteous retribution, O Ben!

In the rich Epigram 101, "Inviting a Friend to Supper," from which I have already quoted in Section vii., we have the following lines:—

" But that which most doth take my Muse and me,  
Is a pure cup of rich Canary wine,  
Which is the Mermaid's now, but shall be mine :  
Of which had Horace or Anacreon tasted,  
Their lives, as do their lines, till now had lasted.  
Tobacco, nectar, or the Thespian spring,  
Are all but Luther's beer, to this I sing."

Brave old Ben! we know you here again! Every man has the right to have his own particular idol, and to exalt it in hyperbole by depreciating the most precious things or most noble natures in comparison therewith. Wherefore, we quarrel not with this extreme devotion to Canary, nor with the supremacy claimed for it. Rather we welcome our glorious convivialist of the Mermaid Tavern, our boon Delphic god of the Apollo room, seeing how rightly he ranks our rich Indian vapour with nectar and the Thespian

spring. Aught more precious he could not find to name with the very darling of his heart. Brave old big Ben!

With these generous lines we must close our excerpts, although we could glean a few others of minor importance. I can scarcely better conclude this long series of papers than with some sentences from Mr. Swinburne's very fine Introduction to the works of George Chapman (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875), which has also been reprinted separately:—

“Even the Atlantean shoulders of Jonson, fit to bear the weight of mightiest monarchies, have been hardly tasked to support and transmit to our own day the fame of his great genius, overburdened as it was with the twofold load of his theories on art and his pedantries of practice.\* And Chapman, though also a brother of the giant brood, had not the Herculean sinews of his younger friend and fellow-student. The weight that could but bend the back that carried the vast world of invention whose twin hemispheres are ‘Volpone’ and the ‘Alchemist,’ was wellnigh enough to crush the staggering strength of the lesser Titan. . . . The learning of Jonson, doubtless far wider and sounder than that of Chapman, never allowed or allured him to exchange for a turbid and tortuous jargon the vigorous purity of his own English spirit and style. . . . But when on a fresh reading we skip over these blocks [the savourless interludes of buffoonery, too common in even our best old plays, whether comedies or tragedies: gross baits for the gross

\* *Per contra*: Lamb, for whose critical genius Mr. Swinburne has a most righteous admiration, says of the “Poetaster”: “This Roman play seems written to confute those enemies of Ben, in his own day and ours, who have said that he made a pedantical use of his learning. He has here revived the whole court of Augustus by a learned spell. We are admitted to the society of the illustrious dead. Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Tibullus converse in our own tongue more finely and poetically than they were used to express themselves in their native Latin,” &c.

groundlings] laid as if on purpose in our way through so magnificent a gallery of comic and poetic inventions, the monument of a mind so mighty, the palace of so gigantic a genius as Ben Jonson's, we are more than content to forget such passing and perishable impediments to our admiration of that sovereign intellect which has transported us across them into the royal presence of its ruling and informing power. . . . Here, again, we find that Jonson and Chapman stand far apart from their fellow-men of genius. The most ambitious and the most laborious poets of their day, conscious of high aims and large capacities, they would be content with no crown that might be shared by others ; they had each his own severe and haughty scheme of study and invention, and sought for no excellence which lay beyond or outside it ; that any could lie above, past the reach of their strong arms and skilful hands, past the scope of their keen and studious eyes, they would probably have been unable to believe or to conceive. And yet there were whole regions of high poetic air, whole worlds of human passion and divine imagination, which might be seen by humbler eyes than theirs and trodden by feebler feet, where their robust lungs were powerless to breathe, and their strenuous song fell silent."

The reader will do well to study the whole of this Introduction, which is not unworthy in its sphere of the author of "Atalanta in Calydon," being the fit reverse of the golden medallion of which that is the noble obverse.



## THE POEMS OF WILLIAM BLAKE \*

"I assert for myself that I do not behold the outward creation, and that to me it is hindrance, and not action. . . . I question not my corporeal eye any more than I would question a window concerning a sight. I look through it, and not with it."

"The angel who presided at my birth  
Said : Little creature, formed of joy and mirth,  
Go, love without the help of anything on earth."

BEFORE the publication of these volumes I knew but one of Blake's poems, that on the Human Form, or Divine Image, quoted by James John Garth Wilkinson in his great work. The wisdom and the celestial simplicity of this little piece prepared one to love the author and all that he had done ; yet the selections from his poems and other writings were a revelation

\* "Life of William Blake, *Pictor Ignotus*, with Selections from his Poems and other Writings." By the late Alexander Gilchrist, author of the "Life of William Etty." Illustrated from Blake's own works, in facsimile, by W. J. Linton, and in photolithography, with a few of Blake's original plates. In 2 vols. London : Macmillan & Co., 1863.

I give the full title, in recommending the work to all good readers. The first volume contains the Life and a noble supplementary chapter by Mr. D. G. Rossetti ; the second volume contains the Selections, admirably edited by Mr. D. G. Rossetti, with the assistance of Mr. W. M. Rossetti. There is magnificent prose as well as poetry in the selections, and the engravings in themselves are worth more than most books.

far richer than my hopes. Not only are these selections most beautiful in themselves, they are also of great national interest as filling up a void in the cycle of our poetic literature. I had long felt, and probably many others had felt, that much of the poetry of the present and the last age *must* have had an antecedent less remote in time than the Elizabethan works, and less remote in resemblance than the works of Cowper and Burns; yet, since Macaulay's essay on Byron appeared, Cowper and Burns—and in general these two only—had been continually named as the heralds of that resurrection of her poetry which makes glorious for England the crescent quarter of the nineteenth century. A third herald of that resurrection was undoubtedly William Blake; and although he was scarcely listened to at all, while his colleagues held in attention the whole kingdom, the fact may at length be recognised that by him, even more clearly than by them, was anticipated and announced both the event now already past and the event still in process of evolution. ✓

If it be objected that one who was scarcely listened to at all could not exercise much influence, the reply is that we are concerned not with the influence, but with the accuracy and period of the presage. It is written that mankind did not heed Noah, or heeded only to mock, during the six-score years in which he foretold the Flood and built the Ark ready for it. If the Flood really came as he foretold, it attested the truth of his inspiration; but no one now would think that his prophecies were instrumental in accomplishing their own fulfilment, although this opinion must have been general among those who were being sub-

merged. Or we may answer, applying a metaphor which has been with good reason much used, that the mountain-peaks which in any district first reflect the rays of the dawn exercise little or no influence on the dawn's development, even in relation to the country around them; they cast some glimmer of light into obscure valleys below (whose obscurity, on the other hand, their shadows make trebly deep when the sun is sinking); they prophesy very early of the coming noontide; we may judge as to their positions and altitudes by the periods of their reflection; but the dawn would grow and become noon, and the noon would sink and become night, just the same if they were not there. So the Spirit of the Ages, the *Zeitgeist*, is developed universally and independently by its own mysterious laws throughout mankind; and the eminent men from whom it first radiates the expression of what we call a new aspect (the continuous imperceptible increments of change having accumulated to an amount of change which we can clearly perceive, and which even our gross standards are fine enough to measure), the illustrious prototypes of an age, really cast but a faint reflex upon those beneath them; and while pre-eminently interesting in biography, are of small account in history except as prominent indices of growth and progress and decay, as early effects, not efficient causes. They help us to read clearly the advance of time; but this advance they do not cause any more than the gnomon of a sundial causes the procession of the hours which it indicates, or a tidal-rock the swelling of the seas whose oncoming is signalled in white foam around it and in shadowed waters over it.

The message of Cowper has been heard (it was not a very great announcement, and he uttered it neatly and distinctly and honestly), has been laid to heart by the many for whom it was sufficient, and is now in due season passing out of mind with the fulfilment of its purpose. Very little of his poetry can be expected to survive our century. Burns will live with the language; but it must be remembered that his poetry is not blossom and promise; it is consummate fruition; it points to the past more than to the future; it is the genial life, the heroism, the history, the song of his whole people for ages, gathered up and sublimated in and by one supreme man. This King of Scotland happened to come in the guise of a herald to England, but none the less was he a king, the last and greatest of a glorious line; and no other majesty than his own was behind the messenger. Shakespeare made perfect the English drama, and there has arisen no English drama since; Burns made perfect Scottish song, and there has arisen no Scottish song since. When the genius of a nation has attained (human) perfection in any one form and mode, it leaves to ambitious mediocrity all future rivalry with that monumental perfection, itself seeking to become perfect in some new form or mode.

Blake's first volume of poetry was printed (one cannot add *published*) in 1783, about the same time as the first volume of Cowper and a little before that of Burns; Crabbe's first popular poem, "The Village," was printed in the same year. Seventeen years afterwards, Hayley was in high repute, and

Blake went to live near him to engrave illustrations for some of his works. The "Lyrical Ballads" of Coleridge and Wordsworth did not appear until 1798; "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" until 1805. Byron was born in 1788, Shelley in 1792, Keats in 1796. The poems in this first volume had been written by Blake in the interval, 1768-1777, between the ages of eleven and twenty years.

Never, perhaps, was a book of verse printed more strange to the literature of its period; and one scarcely knows whether to account the novelty more or less wonderful because relative and not absolute, because the novelty of the long dead past come back to life rather than of a new future just born. The spirit of the great Elizabethan Age was incarnate once more, speaking through the lips of a pure and modest youth. "My Silks and Fine Array" might have been written by Shakespeare, by Beaumont and Fletcher, or by Sir Walter Raleigh. Its sweet irregular artless cadences are not more different from the sharp measured metallic ring of the rhymes of the scholars of Pope, than is its natural sentiment from the affected sentimentalities then in the mode. Of all the other eighteenth century writers, I think Chatterton alone (as in the Dirge in "Ella") has anything kindred to it; and Chatterton was archaic consciously and with intent. The "Mad Song" immediately reminds us of the character assumed by Edgar in *Lear* (a common character in Shakespeare's time, else Edgar would not have assumed it), and of the old 'Tom o' Bedlam songs. In the fine specimen of these, preserved by the elder Disraeli in his "Curiosities of Literature," three main elements

can easily be distinguished : the grotesque but horrible cry of misery wrung from the heart of the poor, half-witted, cruelly treated vagabond ; the intentional fooling of the beggar and mountebank, baiting for the charity that is caught with a laugh in its mouth, maddening for his bread ; the genuine lunacy of a wild and over-excited imagination, ungoverned so long that it is now quite ungovernable. The first gives us such lines as these :—

“ In the lovely lofts of Bedlam,  
In stubble soft and dainty ;  
Brave bracelets strong,  
Sweet whips ding-dong,  
And a wholesome hunger plenty.”

The second such as these :—

“ Of thirty bare years have I  
Twice twenty been enraged ;  
And of forty been  
Three times fifteen  
In durance soundly caged.”

The third such as these, which Edgar Allan Poe (a fine artist even in the choice of his mottoes) prefixed to his “ Unparalleled Adventure of one Hans Pfaall ”—

“ With a heart of furious fancies  
Whereof I am commander ;  
With a burning spear,  
And a horse of air,  
To the wilderness I wander.”

Or these :—

“ I know more than Apollo ;  
For oft when he lies sleeping,  
I behold the stars  
At mutual wars,  
And the rounded welkin weeping.”

As Tom o' Bedlams did not wander the country when Blake wrote, the elements of vagabondage and mountebankism are not in his piece; but as an expression of lunacy—the government of reason overthrown, and wild imagination making the anarchy more anarchic by its reign of terror—it is thoroughly of the old Elizabethan strain. Here is a stanza which Edgar might have sung in the storm by the hovel on the heath:—

“Like a fiend in a cloud,  
With howling woe  
After night I do crowd,  
And with night will go;  
I turn my back to the East  
Whence comforts have increased;  
For light doth seize my brain  
With frantic pain.”

Mark the appalling power of the verb *crowd*, revealing, as by a lightning-flash, the ruins of sane personality, haunted and multitudinous, literally *beside itself*. Not one poet in twenty would have dared to use the word thus, and yet (although a careless reader might think it brought in merely for the sake of the rhyme) it was the very word to use. The address “To the Muses,” sweet, calm, and masterly, as if the matured utterance of a conviction well pondered and of no recent date, yet written by a mere boy, embodies the essence of all that Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley, many years afterwards, taught and sang in vindication of Pre-Drydenism.

The poems in blank verse “To the Evening Star,” “To Spring,” and “To Summer,” are perhaps even more wonderful than those in rhyme, considering the

age of the writer and the epoch of our literature in which they were produced. With the exception of the "Ode to Evening," I do not remember any blank verse of the century at all similar to them in tone. And the Ode of Collins, fine as it is, suffers greatly in the comparison with them; for it does not reach their noble breadth of conception and execution, and it is not quite free from then current affectations. These pieces are not perfect in art, but they are perfect in the spirit of their art; they have certain laxities and redundances of rhythm, and are here and there awkward in diction, but such youthful sweet errors rather grace than spoil "that large utterance of the early gods." They have the grandeur of lofty simplicity, not of laboured pomp, a grandeur like that which invests our imaginations of the patriarchs. By a well beneath a palm tree, stands one who wears but a linen turban and a simple flowing robe, and who but watches browsing sheep and camels drinking; yet no modern monarch, however gorgeously arrayed and brilliantly surrounded, can compare with him in majesty.

The Selections from the first volume printed by Blake include extracts from a dramatic work, "Edward the Third." It was an attempt to revive the great English Historical Drama, an attempt which failed, and of which all repetitions are pretty sure to fail; the English Historical Drama flourished in a period whose history was itself dramatic, and such a period is not likely to revolve again on our England. But one piece from this drama I must quote at length, and it is hardly rash to prophesy that this same piece will be quoted at length for many generations to



come in all worthy books of specimens of the choicest British poetry. The time is the eve of Cressy; the scene is the camp of Edward : a minstrel sings :—

“O Sons of Trojan Brutus, clothed in war,  
Whose voices are the thunder of the field,

. . . . .

Your ancestors came from the fires of Troy  
(Like lions roused by lightning from their dens,  
Whose eyes do glare against the stormy fires),  
Heated with war, filled with the blood of Greeks,  
With helmets hewn, and shields covered with gore ;  
In navies black, broken with wind and tide.

. . . . .

They landed in firm array upon the rocks  
Of Albion : they kissed the rocky shore :  
‘Be thou our mother and our nurse,’ they said,  
‘Our children’s mother ; and thou shalt be our grave,  
The sepulchre of ancient Troy, from whence  
Shall rise cities, and thrones, and awful powers.’

. . . . .

Our fathers swarm from the ships. Giant voices  
Are heard from out the hills ; the enormous sons  
Of Ocean run from rocks and caves ; wild men  
Naked, and roaring like lions, hurling rocks,  
And wielding knotty clubs, like oaks entangled,  
Thick as a forest ready for the axe.

. . . . .

Our fathers move in firm array to battle ;  
The savage monsters rush like roaring fire,  
Like as a forest roars with crackling flames  
When the red lightning borne by furious storm  
Lights on some woody shore, and the parched heavens  
Rain fire into the molten raging sea.

. . . . .

Our fathers, sweating, lean on their spears and view  
The mighty dead : giant bodies streaming blood,  
Dread visages frowning in silent death.

Then Brutus speaks, inspired ; our fathers sit  
 Attentive on the melancholy shore.  
 Hear ye the voice of Brutus : ' The flowing waves  
 Of Time come rolling o'er my breast,' he said,  
 ' And my heart labours with futurity.  
 Our sons shall rule the empire of the sea,  
 Their mighty wings shall stretch from East to West ;  
 Their nest is in the sea, but they shall roam  
 Like eagles for their prey.

• • • • •  
 ' Our sons shall rise from thrones in joy, each one  
 Buckling his armour on ; Morning shall be  
 Prevented \* by the gleaming of their swords,  
 And Evening hear their songs of victory.

• • • • •  
 ' Freedom shall stand upon the cliffs of Albion,  
 Casting her blue eyes over the green ocean ;  
 Or, towering, stand upon the roaring waves,  
 Stretching her mighty spear o'er distant lands,  
 While with her eagle wings she covereth  
 Fair Albion's shore and all her families.' "

This is the song of the Minstrel as given in the Selections. I have the highest esteem for the taste and judgment of Mr. Dante G. Rossetti, and the whole reading public owes him no common debt of gratitude for his work in the second volume as well as for the supplementary chapter in the first. It is probable, it is almost certain, that he has published quite as much of Blake's poetry and prose as it was prudent to publish experimentally after the neglect of eighty years. But if the above inter-lineal points mark omissions, the omitted passages should be reinstated in the next edition ; the whole

\* *Prevented*, I need hardly say, is used here in the old sense of *anticipated*.

of this song, as it stands in Blake's earliest volume or in manuscript, should be given at any rate in an appendix if not in the body of the work. For this chant belongs to the whole British people; it is one of the most precious among the most precious heirlooms bequeathed to us by our forefathers; it is a national jewel of such magnificence that no one man, however honest and skilful, can be trusted to cut it and set it in accordance with his private opinion.

We English are surely a strange people. Pictures beyond price are bequeathed to us, and our first step towards disposing of them satisfactorily is to bury them away where they cannot be seen. A song is chanted for us which should thrill and swell every native heart with patriotic pride, a song great with the grandeur of our national life and history for three millenniums of legends and annals and journals, a song heroic as Cressy, sublime as Trafalgar; and for fourscore years we leave it to that oblivion of oblivions which has never had any remembrance. The poet lives forty years after giving this glorious song to his people, devotedly loyal to his highest inspirations, pure, poor, obscure; and when he dies, it is here and there casually remarked that a clever madman has at length reached the sanity of the grave. Again forty years come and go ere a few admirers worthy of him they admire can venture with much diffidence (surely but too well founded!) to bespeak the favour of his people for this song, in which he has added a great and burning light to their illustrations the most splendid, and for other songs in which he has given them the seed whose harvest is likely to be

the wealth and spiritual subsistence of generations yet unborn.

When Blake wrote this, however young in years, he was undoubtedly mature; as Keats when he wrote "Hyperion," as Shelley when he wrote "Adonais," or "The Triumph of Life." We shall all soon know it by heart, and cherish it in our hearts, with the speeches of Henry at Agincourt and the "Scots wha hae" of Burns, with Campbell's "Mariners of England," and Robert Browning's "Home Thoughts from the Sea;" and then we shall feel and know that for us it is perfect beyond criticism, except the criticism of reverend interpretation. It is Titanic, and it cleaves to its mother earth like a Titan, like a mountain, like a broad oak-tree; and the grandeur of its strength is the grandeur of a gnarled oak whose vigorous life bursts through all conventional symmetries, the grandeur of a mountain which the central fires have heaved into lines enormous and savagely irregular.

Many years afterwards, in 1789, when Blake was thirty-two, the "Songs of Innocence" appeared; and we learn from them the strange fact that he who was mature in his childhood and youth became in his manhood a little child. A little child, pure in soul as the serenest light of the morning, happy and innocent as a lamb leaping in the meadows, singing all its joy in the sweetest voice with that exquisite infantine lisp which thrills the adult heart with yearning tenderness.\* The "Introduction," "The

\* "Let the reader try to breathe like a child, and let the auditors of the breath decide whether he succeeds or no. There is indeed in adult breath such a peopling of multitudinous

Lamb," "The Chimney Sweeper," the "Laughing Song," "A Cradle Song," "Holy Thursday," "Infant

thoughts, such a tramp of hardness and troubles, as does not cede to the attempt to act the infantine even for a moment." (Dr. J. J. Garth Wilkinson, "The Human Body and its Connexion with Man," p. 98, note.) What is true of common breathing, is true more conspicuously of breathing idealised and harmonised, of the breathing of song in which psychical have superseded the physical rhythms. The adult cannot sing like a child; but Blake in these Songs does so: he did not *act* the infantine, for he *was* infantine, by a regeneration as real while as mysterious as ever purest saint experienced in the religious life. And this regeneration, so far as we can learn, was effected without the throes of agony and doubt and despair, which the saints all pass through in being born again.

I am merely writing a few remarks on the poet, not sketching the life and character of the man; but I may be allowed to call the attention of readers to this wonderful life and character. Blake was always poor in world's wealth, always rich in spiritual wealth, happy and contented and assured, living with God. As to his soul's salvation, I do not believe that he ever gave it a thought, any more than a child thinks of the question whether its loving parents will continue to feed and clothe and cherish it. He had none of the feverish raptures and hypochondriac remorse which even in the best of those who are commonly called saints excite a certain contemptuous pity in the midst of love and admiration: he was a thoroughly healthy and happy religious soul, whose happiness was thoroughly unselfish and noble. As to the "Christian Evidences," as they are termed, of which the mass of good people are so enamoured, in trying to argue themselves and others into a sort of belief in a sort (and such a sort!) of deity, he would have no more dreamed of appealing to them than he would have tried elaborately to argue himself into belief in the existence of the sun. "I feel the warmth, I see the light and see by the light: what do you want to argue about? You may call it sun, moon, comet, star, or Will-o'-the-Wisp, if so it pleases you; all I know and care for is this, that day by day it warms and lights me." Such would have been the sum of his reply to any questioner; for he was emphatically a seer, and had the disdain of all seers for the pretensions of gropers and guessers who are blind. Like Swedenborg, he always relates things heard and seen; more purely a mystic than Swedenborg, he does not condescend to dialectics and scholastic divinity. Those

Joy," "The Divine Image;" what holy and tender and beautiful babe-lullabies, babe joy-songs, are these! The ideal Virgin Mother might have sung them to her infant; lambs and doves and flowers might comprehend them; they are alone in our language, which they glorify by revealing its unsuspected treasures of heavenly innocence and purity. I transcribe one of the shortest of them, "Infant Joy;" a sudden throb of maternal rapture which we should have thought inarticulate—expressible only by kisses and caresses and wordless cradle-crooning—marvellously caught up and rendered into song.

"I have no name,  
I am but two days old."

who fancy that a dozen stony syllogisms seal up the perennial fountain of our deepest questionings, will affirm that Blake's belief was an illusion. But an illusion constant and self-consistent and harmonious with the world throughout the whole of a man's life, wherein does this differ from a reality? Metaphysically we are absolutely unable to prove any existence: we believe that those things really exist which we find pretty constant and consistent in their relations to us—a very sound practical but very unsound philosophical belief. Blake and Swedenborg and other true mystics (Jesus among them) undoubtedly had senses other than ours; it is as futile for us to argue against the reality of their perceptions as it would be false in us to pretend that our perceptions are the same. As, however, Blake was supremely a mystic, it is but fair to add that he (and the same may be affirmed of Jesus) was unlike common Christians as thoroughly as he was unlike common atheists; he lived in a sphere far removed from both. In the clash of the creeds, it is always a comfort to remember that sects with their sectaries, orthodox and heterodox, could not intersect at all, if they were not in the same plane. Blake's esteem for argumentation may be read in one couplet:—

"If the sun and moon should doubt  
They'd immediately go out."

"What shall I call thee?  
 'I happy am,  
 Joy is my name.'  
 Sweet joy befall thee.

Pretty joy !  
 Sweet joy but two days old,  
 Sweet joy I call thee :  
 Thou dost smile,  
 I sing the while,  
 Sweet joy befall thee."

7

Five years later come the "Songs of Experience," and the singer is an older child, and even a youth, but not yet a man. The experience is that of a sensitive and thoughtful boy, troubled by the first perceptions of evil where he has believed all good, thinking the whole world cruel and false since some playmate-friend has turned unkind, seeing life all desolate and blank since some coveted object has disappointed in the possession ; in short, through very lack of experience, generalising one untoward event into a theory of life that seems more bitterly hopeless than grey-haired cynical pessimism. Even the "Garden of Love," "The Human Abstract," "The Two Songs," "To Tirzah," and "Christian Forbearance" (one of the keenest arrows of Beelzebub shot straight back with wounding scorn at the evil-archer), are not in thought and experience beyond the capacity of meditative boyhood. "The Tiger" is a magnificent expression of boyish wonder and admiring terror ; "The Crystal Cabinet" is a fairy dream of early youth ; "The Golden Net" is a fine dream of adolescence. Perhaps in only three more of his briefer poems do we find Blake mature

(it must be borne in mind that his second maturity unfolded itself in pictures rather than songs); "Broken Love," "Auguries of Innocence," and the Letter in verse, dated from Felpham, to his friend, Mr. Butts. These are mature as to their conception, as to the amount and quality of experience and thought involved in them, but occasionally very immature in execution. There is, indeed, one piece of twenty lines mature in every respect, although written so late as 1807: I mean the verses to Queen Charlotte with his illustrations of Blair's "Grave":—

"The door of death is made of gold,  
That mortal eyes cannot behold;  
But when the mortal eyes are closed,  
And cold and pale the limbs reposed,  
The soul awakes and wondering sees  
In her mild hand the golden keys.  
The grave is Heaven's golden gate,  
And rich and poor around it wait:  
O Shepherdess of England's Fold,  
Behold this gate of pearl and gold!

To dedicate to England's Queen  
The visions that my soul hath seen,  
And by her kind permission bring  
What I have borne on solemn wing  
From the vast regions of the grave,  
Before her throne my wings I wave,  
Bowing before my sovereign's feet:  
The Grave produced these blossoms sweet  
In mild repose from earthly strife,  
The blossoms of eternal life!"

And here are a few more lines almost as majestically mature as one of his inventions for the "Books of Job":—



"Jesus sat in Moses' chair ;  
 They brought the trembling woman there :  
 Moses commands she be stoned to death ;  
 What was the sound of Jesus' breath ?  
 He laid his hands on Moses' law :  
 The ancient heavens in silent awe,  
 Writ with curses from pole to pole,  
 All away began to roll :  
 'To be good only, is to be  
 A God, or else a Pharisee.' "

The man who wrote this might well proclaim : "I touch the heavens as an instrument to glorify the Lord."

"Broken Love" needs no comment here : Mr. W. M. Rossetti has done the best that could be done by the most subtle and patient sympathy to interpret it. I subjoin half-a-dozen lines from the "Auguries of Innocence" :—

"A Robin red-breast in a cage  
 Puts all Heaven in a rage ;  
 A dove-house full of doves and pigeons  
 Shudders Hell through all its regions ;  
 A skylark wounded on the wing  
 Doth make a cherub cease to sing."

It has been objected (strangely enough, in *Macmillan's Magazine*) to such couplets as these, that they express a truth with such exaggerated emphasis as wholly to distort it, as to make it virtually an untruth. No objection could be more unwise, for it is the result of reading the author's intention precisely *backwards*. His object was not to expand a small fact into a universal truth, but to concentrate the full essence of a universal truth into a small fact. He was intent on making great laws portable, not little

events insupportable. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered."—"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment." "For verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." These texts from the mouth of one of the sublimest of mystics realise the very same object in the very same manner. The sharply cut symbol leaves a distinct and enduring impression, where the abstract dogma would have perhaps made no impression at all. Briefly, in almost every couplet of this poem, Blake has attempted what all profound poets and thinkers have ever most earnestly attempted—to seize a rude but striking image of some sovereign truth, and to stamp it with roughest vigour on the commonest metal for universal circulation. To such attempts we owe all the best proverbs in the world; the abounding small currency of our intellectual commerce, more invaluable essential to our ordinary daily business than nuggets of gold, than rubies, and pearls, and diamonds.

As to the longer poems produced after the "Songs of Experience"—"Visions of the Daughters of Albion, Europe, Jerusalem, Ahania, Urizen, &c."—the Selections given by Mr. Gilchrist are not sufficient to enable

one to form a settled opinion. This may be said, that a careful study of the whole of them, in the order of the years in which they were written, would probably reveal that they are much less wild and incoherent than even Mr. Gilchrist supposed. Every man living in seclusion and developing an intense interior life, gradually comes to give a quite peculiar significance to certain words and phrases and emblems. Metaphors which to the common bookwrights and journalists are mere handy counters, symbols almost as abstract and unrelated in thought to the things they represent as are the  $x$  and  $y$  and  $z$  used in solving an algebraic problem, are for *him* burdened with rich and various freights of spiritual experience; they are ships in which he has sailed over uncharted seas to unmapped shores, with which he has struggled through wild tempests and been tranced in Divine calms, in which he has returned with treasures from all the zones; and he loves them as the sailor loves his ship. His writings must thus appear, to any one reading them for the first time, very obscure, and often very ludicrous; the strange reader sees a battered old hull, where the writer sees a marvellous circumnavigation. But we ought not to be kept from studying these writings by any apparent obscurity and ludicrousness, if we have found in the easily comprehended vernacular writings of the same man (as in Blake's we certainly *have* found) sincerity and wisdom and beauty. Nor is it probable that even the most mysterious works of Blake would prove more difficult to genuine lovers of poetry than many works of the highest renown prove to nine-tenths of the reading public.

“Sie haben dich, heiliger Hafis,  
 Die mystische Zunge genannt;  
 Und haben, die Wortgelehrten,  
 Den Werth des Worts nicht erkannt.”

For many intelligent persons Carlyle at his best is almost or quite as unintelligible as if he were using an unknown language; and the same may be asserted of Shelley and Robert Browning. (I do not select lofty *old* names, because in their cases the decisions of authoritative judges accumulating throughout centuries overawe our common jurymen into verdicts wise without understanding; so that a dullard can speak securely of the sublimity of Milton, for example, although we are pretty certain that he never got through the first book of the “Paradise Lost,” and that he would find himself in a Slough of Despond when twenty lines deep in the opening passages of “Samson Agonistes.”) Indeed, I doubt whether it would be an exaggeration to assert that, for a very large majority of those who are accounted educated and intelligent people, poetry in itself is essentially an unknown tongue. They admire and remember a verse or a passage for its wit, its cleverness, its wisdom, its clear and brief statement of some fact, its sentiment, its applicability to some circumstance of their own life, its mention of some classic name, its allusion to some historical event; in short, for its associations and not for its poetry *per se*. Yet assuredly there are still men in England with an infallible sense for poetry, however disguised and however far removed from ordinary associations; men who know Shakespeare in despite of the commentators, and understand Browning in contempt of

J the critics, and laugh quietly at the current censures and raptures of the Reviews: and these men would scarcely consider it a waste of time to search into the meaning of the darkest oracles of William Blake.

I wish to add a few words on the relations subsisting between our author and succeeding English poets. In his early maturity, as a reincarnation of the mighty Elizabethan spirit, the first fruit of a constructive after a destructive period, his affinity to the great poets who flourished a few years before his death (he died in 1827) will be readily understood. Thus in the Minstrel's Song, before quoted, we at once discern that the rhythm is of the same strain as the largest utterance of Marlowe and Webster and Shakespeare precedent, and as the noblest modern exemplar, the blank verse of "Hyperion" subsequent.\* It is not, however, in this early maturity, but in his second childhood and boyhood and youth, when he was withdrawn from common life into mysticism, when moonlight was his sunlight, and water was his wine, and the roses red as blood were become all white as snow, in the "Songs of Innocence," the "Songs of Experience," and the "Auguries of Innocence" (always *Innocence*, mark, not *Virtue*) that the seeds may be traced of much which is now half-consciously struggling towards organic perfection, and which in

\* Keats avowed imitation of Milton in the structure of his rhythm. Similarity to the Council in Pandemonium there of course could not but be in the Council of the overthrown Titans; but the verse of Keats (if I have any ear and intelligence for verse) is as different from the verse of Milton as with the same language and the same metrical standard it possibly could be. It is in my judgment even more beautiful and more essentially powerful and sublime than Milton's.

two or three generations may be crowned with foliage and blossoms and fruit as the Tree of Life for one epoch.

The essence of this poetry is mysticism, and the essence of this mysticism is simplicity. The two meanings in which this last word is commonly used—the one reverential, the other kindly contemptuous—are severally appropriate to the most wise and the least wise manifestations of this spirit of mysticism. It sees, and is continually rapturous with seeing, everywhere correspondence, kindred, identity, not only in the things and creatures of earth, but in all things and creatures and beings of hell and earth and heaven, up to the one father (or interiorly to the one soul) of all. It thus ignores or pays little heed to the countless complexities and distinctions of our modern civilisation and science, a knowledge of which is generally esteemed the most useful information and most valuable learning. For it “there is no great and no small;” in the large type of planets and nations, in the minute letters of dewdrops and worms, the same eternal laws are written; and merely as a matter of convenience to the reader is this or that print preferable to the other. And the whole universe being the volume of the Scriptures of the living word of God, this above all is to be heeded, that man should not dwell contented on the lovely language and illustrations, but should live beyond these in the sphere of the realities which they signify. It is passionately and profoundly religious, contemplating and treating every subject religiously, in all its excursions and discursions issuing from the soul to return to the soul, alone, from the alone, to

the alone; and thus it is by no means strict in its theology, being Swedenborgian in one man and Pantheistic in another, while in the East it has readily assimilated Buddhism and Brahminism and Moham-medanism. Its supreme tendency is to remain or to become again childlike, its supreme aspiration is not virtue, but innocence or guilelessness: so that we may say with truth of those whom it possesses, that the longer they live the younger they grow, as if "passing out to God by the gate of birth, not death."

These few hints may serve as points of departure for some slender lines of relation between William Blake the Second and the principal subsequent poets. It must be borne in mind that the object here is not a survey of the full circle of the powers of any of these poets; they may be very great or very small in various other respects, while very small or very great in respect of this mystical simplicity. The heads of Da Vinci and Titian and Rembrandt, the bodies of Correggio and Rubens, would all count for nothing were we instituting a comparison between the old masters simply as painters of the *sky*.

Wordsworth ever aspired towards this simplicity, but the ponderous pedantry of his nature soon dragged him down again when he had managed to reach it. He was a good, conscientious, awkward pedagogue, who, charmed by the charms of childhood, endeavoured himself to play the child. Were it not rather too wicked, I could draw from Æsop another excellent illustration. He was not wrong when he proclaimed himself eminently a teacher; 'tis a pity that six days of the seven his teaching was of the Sunday-school sort.

Coleridge had much of this simplicity. In the "Ancient Mariner" it is supreme; in "Christabel" it does not lack, but already shows signs of getting maudlin; afterwards, "Lay Sermons" with Schelling and the Noetic Pentad, almost or quite extinguished it. He was conscious of the loss, as witness the lines in his great Ode :—

" And haply by abstruse research to steal  
From my own nature all the natural man."

Scott, a thoroughly objective genius, lived and wrote altogether out of the sphere of this simplicity. He had a simplicity of his own, the simplicity of truthfulness and power in his "magnificent and masculine grasp of men and things." Expansive not intensive, he developed no interior life, but diffused himself over the exterior life. His poetry is of action, not of thought; he is as a mighty and valiant soldier, whom we seek on the field of battle, not in the school of the prophets.

Byron had it not at all. He is great, exceedingly great; but great as the expression of intense life, and of such thought only as is the mere tool and weapon of life, never great as the expression of thought above and beneath life commanding and sustaining it. He had just ideality enough to shed a poetic glow upon powers and passions all essentially commonplace, but very uncommonly vigorous, overflowing with the energy of dæmonic possession—an energy most mysterious, but in itself most impatient of mysticism.

Keats, who shall dare to judge? I doubt not that everything pure and beautiful would have had



its season in him who, dying at twenty-four, wrote "Hyperion" a few years after "Endymion." But this plastic genius would have proceeded in triumphant transmigrations through all fairest forms ere it could have found eternal tranquillity in the soul of all form. Had he been spared, all analogies, I think, point to this end.

Shelley possessed, or rather was possessed by, this simplicity to the uttermost. Although he and Keats were twin brothers, Greeks of the race of the gods, their works do not resemble but complement each other. The very childlike lisp which we remarked in Blake is often observable in the voice of Shelley, consummate singer as he was. The lisp is, however, not always that of a child; it is on several occasions that of a missionary seeking to translate old thoughts from his rich and exact native tongue into the dialect, poor and barbarous, of his hearers. He (while doing also very different work of his own) carries on the work begun by Blake, sinking its foundations into a deeper past, and uplifting its towers into a loftier future. Both Shelley and Keats are still so far beyond the range of our English criticism that they would not have been mentioned thus cursorily here had it been possible to omit them.\*

\* Perhaps the astonishing difference in kind between these glorious poets and their contemporaries can best be put in clear light by thus considering them young Greeks of the race of the gods, born three thousand years after their time, in Christian England. Shelley has been called "The Eternal Child," and Keats "The Real Adonis;" and Novalis says well, "Children are ancients, and youth is antique" (*Die Kinder sind Antiken. Auch die Jugend ist antik*, vol. iii. p. 190). The ideas and sentiments of the race among whom they were reared were naturally strange, and in many respects repugnant to them both. Keats,

Tennyson has no more of this simplicity than had Byron: his chief youthful fault was such a young ladyish affectation as could not exist together with it. But he is fully aware of its value, and woos it like a lover, in vain, as Byron wooed it in the latter parts of "Childe Harold" and in "Manfred." Perhaps each of them should be credited with one great exception, in addition to a few short lyrics: Tennyson with the "Lotus Eaters," Byron with the "Dream." Scarcely any other artist in verse of the same rank has ever lived on such scanty revenues of thought (both pure, and applied or mixed) as Tennyson. While it cannot be pretended that he is a great sculptor, he is certainly an exquisite carver of luxuries in ivory; but we must be content to admire the caskets, for there are no jewels inside.

simply ignoring the Bumbleism and Christianity, except in so far as the Bumbleism obstructed his poetic career, unperturbed save by the first throes of creative art, developed himself in the regions from which he sprang—Pagan and Hellenic in his themes, his ideas, his perceptions, his objects. Shelley, on the other hand, started from the time and place of his birth to reach the old dominions of his ancestry. In this enterprise he had to conquer and destroy the terrible armies of fanaticism, asceticism, cant, hypocrisy, narrow-mindedness, lording it over England; and at the same time the spirituality of the new religion, the liberty and equality and fraternity of the new political systems, all things lovely and true and holy of the modern life, he would bear with him for the re-inspiration of the antique. He aspired not to a New Jerusalem in the heavens, but to a new Hellenic metropolis on earth: he looked for redemption and victory, not to Christ on Calvary, but to Prometheus on Caucasus.

These young Greeks could not live to old age. The gloom and chill of our English clime, physical and moral and intellectual, could not but be fatal to these children of the sun. England and France are so proudly in the van of civilisation that it is impossible for a great poet to live greatly to old age in either of them.

His meditation at the best is that of a good leading-article; he is a pensioner on the thought of his age. He is continually petty with that littleness of the second degree which makes a man brag aloud in avoiding some well-known littleness of the first degree. His nerves are so weak that any largish event—a Crimean War or a Volunteer movement—sets him off in hysterics. Nothing gives one a keener insight into the want of robustness in the educated English intellect of the age than the fact that nine-tenths of our best-known literary men look upon him as a profound philosopher. When wax-flowers are oracular oaks, Dodona may be discovered in the Isle of Wight, but hardly until then. Mr. Matthew Arnold's definition of "distilled thought in distilled words" was surely suggested by the processes and productions of a fashionable perfumer. A great school of the poets is dying out: it will die decently, elegantly, in the full odour of respectability, with our Laureate.

Robert Browning, a really great thinker, a true and splendid genius, though his vigorous and restless talents often overpower and run away with his genius so that some of his creations are left but half redeemed from chaos, has this simplicity in abundant measure. In the best poems of his last two works, "Men and Women" and "Dramatis Personæ," its light burns so clear and steadfast through the hurrying clouds of his language (Tennyson's style is the polished reflector of a lamp) that one can only wonder that people in general have not yet recognised it. I cannot recommend a finer study of a man possessed by the spirit of which I

am writing than the sketch of Lazarus in Browning's "Epistle of Karshish, an Arab Physician."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, also, had much of it, yet never succeeded in giving it fair expression. The long study of her sick-bed (and her constant chafing against the common estimate of the talents and genius of her sex) overcharged her works with allusions and thoughts relating to books, and made her style rugged with pedantry. She was often intoxicated, too, with her own vehemence. "Aurora Leigh" sets out determined to walk the world with the great Shakespearian stride, whence desperate entanglement of feminine draperies and blinding swirls of dust. The sonnets entitled "From the Portuguese" reveal better her inmost simple nature.

Emerson stands closest of all in relation to Blake, his verse as well as his essays and lectures being little else than the expression of this mystical simplicity. Were he gifted with the singing voice we should not have to look to the future for its supreme bard. But whenever he has sung a few clear sweet notes, his voice breaks, and he has to recite and speak what he would fain chant. His studies, also, have somewhat injured his style with technicology, making him in his own despite look at Nature through the old church and school windows, often when he should be with her in the rustic air. In some of his shorter poems, however, and in the snatches of Orphic song prefixed to some of his essays (as "Compensation," "Art," "History," "Heroism"), any one with ears to hear may catch pregnant hints of what poetry possessed by this inspiration can accomplish, and therefore *will* accomplish; for no pure inspiration having once

come down among men ever withdraws its influence until it has attained (humanly) perfect embodiment.

In eighty years the influence of this spirit has swelled from the "Songs of Innocence" to the poems of Emerson—a rapid increase of the tide in literature. Other signs of its increase meet us everywhere in the best books of verse published during the last few years. And perchance the increase has been even more rapid than the most of us have opportunity to learn, for we are informed by Mr. Rossetti that James John Garth Wilkinson has not only edited a collection of Blake's Poems, but has himself produced a volume of poems entitled "Improvisations of the Spirit," bearing a strong family likeness to those of Blake; and it may be that Wilkinson has the singing voice which Emerson has not. It would be a boon to the public, at any rate, to make these two volumes easily accessible.

Emerson and Garth Wilkinson, the former undoubtedly the supreme thinker of America, the latter as undoubtedly second to none in England, are surely in themselves sufficient attestation to the truth and depth of the genius of their forerunner, William Blake.

He came to the desert of London town,  
Grey miles long;  
He wandered up and he wandered down,  
Singing a quiet song.

He came to the desert of London town,  
Mirk miles broad;  
He wandered up and he wandered down,  
Ever alone with God.

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There were thousands and thousands of human kind  
    In this desert of brick and stone :  
But some were deaf and some were blind,  
    And he was there alone.

At length the good hour came ; he died,  
    As he had lived, alone :  
He was not missed from the desert wide,  
    Perhaps he was found at the Throne.

## SHELLEY

“WHEREFORE I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him, but whosoever speaketh a word against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him; neither in this world, neither in the world to come.” Which glorious Scripture we may surely understand to mean, that a man may believe or disbelieve in any book, any historical or legendary personage, any dogmatic formula, and yet be in a state of salvation; that only who rejects and violates the Holy Spirit of love and truth, the Conscience of the World, he cannot (because he will not) be saved. Jesus, though absorbed in his personal mission, could speak this truth of sublime toleration; but eighteen centuries have not taught His disciples the wisdom of believing it and acting upon it. Whom He absolved, they dare condemn.

Probably no man of this century has suffered more and more severely, both in person and reputation, from this rash convictive bigotry than Percy Bysshe Shelley. Florence to the living Dante was not more cruelly unjust than England to the living Shelley.

Only now, nearly forty years after his death, do we begin to discern his true glory. It is well that this glory is such as can afford to wait for recognition; that it is one of the permanent stars of heaven, not a rocket to be ruined by a night of storm and rain. I confess that I have long been filled with astonishment and indignation at the manner in which he is treated by the majority of our best living writers. Emerson is serenely throned above hearing him at all; Carlyle only hears him "shriek hysterically;" Mrs. Browning discovers him "blind with his white ideal;" Messrs. Ruskin and Kingsley treat him much as senior schoolboys treat the youngster who easily "walks over their heads" in class—with reluctant tribute of admiration copiously qualified with sneers, pinches, and kicks. Even Bulwer (who, intellectually worthless as he is, now and then serves well as a straw to show how the wind blows among the higher and more educated classes), even Bulwer can venture to look down upon him with pity, to pat him patronisingly on the back, to sneer at him—in "Ernest Maltravers"—with a sneer founded upon a maimed quotation. It was only the other day that a person thought it worth while to send to the *Times* the discovery that Shelley, in his mock-heroic preface to "Peter Bell," had anticipated Macaulay's famous New Zealander! Now, I do not expect that Shelley—any more than piety and lofty thought and heroic action—will ever be extensively popular; I admit that to himself more than to most poets are his own grand words applicable—"the jury that sits in judgment upon a poet, belonging as he does to all time, must be composed of his peers; it must be impanelled by



time from the selectest of the wise of many generations." Yet it was to be expected that men so noble as Kingsley and Ruskin could surrender themselves to generous sympathy with a most noble and generous life, could love and reverence a most loving and reverent spirit; although that life developed itself without the pale of their sanctuary and that spirit dispensed with the theological primer which they conceive necessary to education.

A poet, in our restricted sense of the term, may be defined, an inspired singer; the singing, the spontaneous musical utterance, being essential to the poetical character. Great learning, profound thought, and keen moral insight may all enrich a volume, which shall yet, lacking this instinctive harmony, be no poem. Verse equally with prose may be unpoetic through this fatal want. Through it, George Herbert is almost unread, and the "Heaven and Hell" of Swedenborg is a dull map instead of a transcendent picture; through it—tainting both, but in a less degree—the works of the Brownings are less popular than those of Tennyson, though they in all other noble qualities are so far his superiors.

In musicalness, in free and, as it were, living melody, the poems of Shelley are unsurpassed, and on the whole, I think, unequalled by any others in our literature. Compared with that of most others his language is as a river to a canal—a river ever flowing "at its own sweet will," and whose music is the unpurposed result of its flowing. So subtly sweet and rich are the tones, so wonderfully are developed the perfect cadences, that the meaning of the words of the singing is lost and dissolved in the over-

whelming rapture of the impression. I have often fancied, while reading them, that his words were really transparent, or that they throbbed with living lustres. Meaning is therein firm and distinct, but "scarce visible through extreme loveliness;" so that the mind is often dazzled from perception of the surpassing grandeur and power of his creations. I doubt not that Apollo was mightier than Hercules, though his Divine strength was veiled in the splendour of his symmetry and beauty more Divine.

But when we have allowed that a man is pre-eminently a singer, the question naturally follows, What is the matter of his song? Does his royal robe of verse envelop a real king of men, or one who is intrinsically a slave? And here may fitly be adduced Wordsworth's remark, that the style is less the *dress* than the *incarnation* of the thought. Noble features have been informed by ignoble natures, and beautiful language has expressed thoughts impure and passions hateful: great hearts have pulsed in unsightly bodies, and grand ideas have found but crabbed utterance: yet still it is true that generally the countenance is a legible index to the spirit, and the style to the thought.

With this presumption in his favour, we enter upon four inquiries. (1.) What are the favourite subjects of Shelley's song—great or small? (2.) Is his treatment of these great-minded? (3.) Is it great-hearted? And, rising to the climax, (4.) Is it such as to entitle him to the epithet *inspired*?

(1.) The favourite subjects of Shelley's song, the speculations to which his intellect continually gravitates from the petty interests of the hour, are certainly

great and important above all others. (I omit one theme, whose treatment is common to all poets, so that we conceive it as inseparable from the poetic character—the beauty and harmony of the visible universe: in the celebration of which, however, Shelley displays an intense fervour of admiration and love which almost isolates him above his compeers.) The questions concerning the existence of God, the moral law of the universe, the immortality of the soul, the independent being of what is called the material world, the perfectibility of man: these and their kindred perpetually fascinate his mind to their investigation. It may be considered by many—and not without some show of reason—that mere addictedness to discourse on great subjects is no proof of a great mind: crude painters always daub “high art;” adolescent journalists stoop to nothing below epics; nay, Macaulay long since told us that the very speculations of which we speak are distinctive of immaturity both in nations and in men. Nevertheless, believing that the essence of poetry and philosophy is communication with the Infinite and the Eternal, I venture to conclude that to be strongly inclined to such communication is to be gifted with the first requisite for a poet and a philosopher. The valiant heart may prove victorious without the strong arm, but the strong arm without the valiant heart must be beaten ignominiously for ever.

(2.) But have his thoughts and his conceptions a magnanimity befitting these subjects? He upholds strenuously the Manichean doctrine, that the world is the battlefield of a good and an evil spirit, each aboriginal, of whom the evil has been and still is the

more powerful, but the good shall ultimately triumph. Let those who scoff so liberally at this account for the existence of evil, and a devil created by an omnipotent, all-holy God. How magnificent is his conception of these hostile powers, symbolised in the eagle and serpent, in the opening of "The Revolt of Islam;" how sublime is it in the "Prometheus Unbound," where they are represented by Jupiter and Prometheus!

He proclaims enthusiastically the Idealism of Plato, of Spinoza, of Berkeley, of Kant. Let those who so stolidly sneer at this, expound by what possibility spirit and matter can influence each other without one attribute in common; or let them demonstrate the existence of matter apart from our perception; or let them show, if there be but one existing substance, that it is such as we should call matter rather than spirit. How glorious are his expositions of this philosophy in the "Ode to Heaven" and the speeches of Ahasuerus in "Hellas"!

He devoted himself heart and mind to the doctrine of the perfectibility of human nature, an intrinsic perfectibility to eventuate in a heaven on earth realised by the noble endeavours of man himself; not that which is complacently patronised by many so-called Christians, who are agreed to die and accept a perfect nature as a free gift, when they can no longer live imperfect. As if the severe laws of the universe permitted partial gifts, any more than they permit gainful robberies! Though I must consider Shelley mistaken in this belief, I yet honour and not blame him for it. For his nature must have been most pure and noble, since it could persuade his

peculiarly introspective mind of its truth. Right or wrong, it is the very mainspring of his philosophic system. In "Queen Mab," in the "Revolt of Islam," in the "Prometheus Unbound," its expression glows with the solemn inspiration of prophecy. As Scott was the poet of the past, and Goethe of the present, so was Shelley of the future; the thought of whose developed triumphs always kindles him into rapture. However dissident, we cannot but reverence so sublime and unselfish an enthusiasm: perchance, were we more like him in goodness, we should be more like him in faith. Expand the stage from our earth to the universe, the time from one life to an infinite succession of lives; let the *dramatis personæ* be not men only but all living souls; and this catastrophe, if catastrophe there must be, is the most righteous and lofty conclusion ever suggested for the great drama.

Of his opinions concerning the right relations of the sexes, I can only say that they appear to me radically correct. And of his infidelity, that he attacked not so much Christianity as Priestianity—that blind, unspiritual orthodoxy which freezes the soul and fetters the mind, vilifying the holiest essence of all religion. Space being restricted, suffice it to say that in all his thoughts one is struck by a certain loftiness and breadth characteristic of the best minds. It is as if they looked around from the crest of a mountain, with vision un baffled by the crowd and the chimney-tops. Now, exactly as the height at which a person stands may be calculated from any one object on his horizon as well as from a hundred, so

one of these superior thoughts is in itself proof sufficient of an elevated mind. For quantity is the measure of low things, but quality of high. Ten small apples may be worth more than one large; but not any number of small thoughts can equal one great. Ten weak arms may be stronger than one stalwart, but what number of weak minds can equal one that is powerful?

(3.) What moral emotion, pure or impure, noble or mean, generous or selfish, does Shelley effuse through his works? The question has been partly answered already, for, in a poet whose theme is concrete with man and abstract with destiny, the spirit refuses to be analysed into thought and passion, being the identity of the two. Morally, he is indeed sainted. Never yet did man thrill and glow with more love of his fellows, more self-sacrificing sympathy with all life, more hatred of fraud and cruelty—yet hatred interfused with the tenderest pity, more noble independence, candour, and intrepidity, more devoted reverence for goodness and truth. In what is understood by the present age as a truly Christian spirit, he bears comparison with the holiest of Christians. The creeds, the rituals, the ceremonies—those media which common men require to temper the else intolerable splendour of Divine truth—he did not need: his eagle-eye could gaze unblenching upon the cloudless sun; and his life incarnated his poetry. He was his own Prometheus. That fatal *per contra* with which Emerson is obliged to conclude his magnificent summary of Shakespeare cannot be urged against Shelley. He perceived—who better?—the symbolism of the visible world; he appreciated—who

more rapturously?—its Divine beauty ; but he did not rest here—he lived higher to the beauty of that which is symbolised, to the beauty which is called “of holiness,” to the laws of that realm which is eternal. He was not “master of the revels to mankind,” but prophet and preacher. His music was as the harping of David to charm away the evil spirit from Saul.

And thus we have crossed the threshold of our last inquiry—is he entitled, in a high sense, to be called *inspired*? That he was a singer who sang songs beautiful, wise, and pure may be affirmed of many a poet, though of no two with the same emphasis. What is it, then, which differentiates him from the second-class poets, and exalts him to sit with Isaiah and Dante, as one of that small choir of chief singers who are called transcendent? It is that of which I but now spoke ; it is that of which he is so often accused under the name of mysticism. I dare affirm that no great writer is less obscure in manner, in expression than he : obscure in matter he is, and ever must be, to those in whom is not developed the faculty correlative to those ideas in whose expression he supremely delights. Were the most of us born deaf, we should reprobate as obscure and mystical those gifted men who dilated upon the ravishment of music. And to the ideal or spiritual harmonies, perfect and eternal, to whose rhythm and melody the universe is attuned, so that it is fitly named Cosmos—to these we *are*, most of us, deaf ; and whoever, with reverence and love and rapture, is devoted to their celebration—be it Plato or Swedenborg, Emerson or Shelley—shall for ever to the great mass be

as one who is speaking in an unknown tongue, or who is raving of fantasies which have no foundation in reality.

Therefore, the accusations of mysticism but ignorantly affirm that he was most intensely and purely a poet. Plato, in the *Ion* (Shelley's translation) says: "For the authors of those great poems which we admire do not attain to excellence through the rules of any art; but they utter their beautiful melodies of verse in a state of inspiration, and, as it were, *possessed* by a spirit not their own." And again: "For a poet is, indeed, a thing ethereally light, winged, and sacred; nor can he compose anything worth calling poetry until he becomes inspired, and, as it were, mad. . . . For, whilst a man retains any portion of the thing called reason, he is utterly incompetent to produce poetry or to vaticinate." This great truth has been enounced or implied by all true philosophers, though sadly abused by uninspired poetasters, and as obviously obnoxious as the Berkeleyan Idealism to stupid and unavailing sneers. Shelley himself, in that "Defence of Poetry" which is one of the most beautiful prose-pieces in the language, and which, in serene elevation of tone and expanse and subtlety of thought, is worthy of Plato or Emerson, repeatedly and throughout insists upon it as the essential law of poetic creation.

The only true or inspired poetry is always from within, not from without. The experience contained in it has been spiritually transmuted from lead into gold. It is severely logical, the most trivial of its adornments being subservient to and suggested by



the dominant idea, any departure from whose dictates would be the "falsifying of a revelation." It is unadulterated with worldly wisdom, deference to prevailing opinions, mere talent or cleverness. Its anguish is untainted by the gall of bitterness, its joy is never selfish, its grossness is never obscene. It perceives always the profound identity underlying all surface differences. It is a living organism, not a dead aggregate, and its music is the expression of the law of its growth; so that it could no more be set to a different melody than could a rose-tree be consummated with lilies or violets. It is most philosophic when most enthusiastic, the clearest light of its wisdom being shed from the keenest fire of its love. It is a synthesis not arithmetical, but algebraical; that is to say, its particular subjects are universal symbols, its predicates universal laws; hence it is infinitely suggestive. It is ever-fresh wonder at the infinite mystery, ever-young faith in the eternal soul. Whatever be its mood, we feel that it is not self-possessed but God-possessed; whether the God came down serene and stately as Jove, when, a swan, he wooed Leda; or with overwhelming might insupportably burning, as when he consumed Semele.

These distinctive marks of the highest poetry I find displayed in the works of Shelley more gloriously than in those of any other poet in our language. As we must study Shakespeare for knowledge of idealised human nature, and Fielding for knowledge of human nature unidealised, and Carlyle's "French Revolution" as the unapproached model of history, and Currer Bell's "Villette" to learn the highest

capabilities of the novel, and Ruskin for the true philosophy of art, and Emerson for quintessential philosophy, so must we study, and so will future men more and more study Shelley for quintessential poetry. It was a good nomenclator who first called him the poet of poets.

He was not thirty when he died. Had he but lived for another thirty years?—In the purity of our fervent youth, I think we all consecrate ourselves to an early death; but the gods cannot love us all with a partial love, and most of us must dwindle down through age and decrepitude into the grave. But Shelley, while singing of the millennial future, and chanting beatitudes of our free and pure and love-united posterity, knew with undeceiving pre-science that he could not live to see even the first straight steps taken towards the glorious goal. The tomb which he selected and described with almost passionate tenderness in 1821, received his ashes in 1822. And so may we trust that the prophecy of 1821 was fulfilled in 1822:—

“ The breath whose might I have invoked in song  
Descends on me ; my spirit's bark is driven  
Far from the shore ; far from the trembling throng  
Whose sails were never to the tempest given ;  
The massy earth and sphered skies are riven !  
I am borne darkly, fearfully afar :  
Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,  
The soul of Adonais, like a star,  
Beacons from the abodes where the eternal are.”

If this meagre essay attracts any worthy student to Shelley, it will fulfil the purpose of its publication,

miserably as it fails to fulfil my desire to render honourable tribute of love and gratitude to this poet of poets and purest of men, whose works and life have been to me, from my youth up, a perennial source of delight and inspiration.

## SHELLEY'S RELIGIOUS OPINIONS \*

MY DEAR EIKONOKLASTES,—In the *National Reformer* of August the 4th, you quote a few words from one G. T., in support of your own opinion that Shelley was an Atheist. Can you spare me space for a few remarks on the subject?

I have none of Shelley's letters by me, save those which are included in Mrs. Shelley's edition of his prose writings. But a man's letters do not always afford the best evidence concerning his opinions upon the most important questions put to us by life. In friendly letters one permits himself to give the reins to his mood, to throw off rough and ready sketches with little care as to the accurate shading, to be capricious and paradoxical—in short, to speak *not* as one who is delivering testimony on oath. Of course I do not speak of serious and solemn epistles, but of the general run of correspondence. On the other hand, you may be sure that the public works of a man so brave, so honest, so enthusiastic as Shelley record his profoundest convictions on the most momentous subjects. I wish, therefore, to bring to your notice some passages

\* This letter appeared in the *National Reformer*, which was then edited by Charles Bradlaugh, who at that time called himself "Iconoclast," in his public capacity as editor and lecturer.

of these works which tend to elucidate the question as to his creed.

Let us begin by putting the "Queen Mab" out of court. It was written when he was a mere youth, and its doctrines are shortly condemned in a couple of sentences by himself, written in some after year. "This materialism is a seducing system to young and superficial minds. It allows its disciples to talk, and dispenses them from thinking." These words are from his fragment "On Life," and allude to his own early materialism.

"Alastor," written in 1815, is pervaded with an indefinite Nature-worship, which you would probably call Cosmism. This reappears, much modified or developed, sometimes seemingly contradicted, in all the more important of his subsequent poems. Such physiolatry is not uncommon in young minds, being the result, not of comprehensive analytical thought, but of enthusiastic love for nature, and vague yearning awe in the contemplation of the mystery of her processes and the immutability of her laws. Nor is it wholly without moral palliation. For though nature is no saint, but systematically sets most of her children to live by devouring one another—massacres good and bad, wise and foolish indiscriminately with storms and earthquakes, plagues and murrains; is fond of implanting incipient scoundrels in royal wombs, and excellent brains in crazy bodies, &c.; yet the good lady has some barbaric virtues of her own—is thoroughly just and independent in her own way; and never yet, in the course of her long existence, cheated the sower of wheat seed by paying him with a rye harvest. Poor man, on the contrary, with

soul, and reason, and virtue, and all sorts of fine pretences, is very weak and much given to roguery ; with all the cardinal virtues to help him, he is quite overruled in the conclave by the more numerous and strong-willed and cardinal vices. Our palace is so grand and we are such pigmies : let us fall down and worship this brave palace, though merely built for us to dwell in as kings ! We are like the parvenu leading Aristippus through his sumptuous mansion, on whom the philosopher spat, finding no other object in the place mean enough to be fouled with expectoration.

In the preface to the "Revolt of Islam," written in 1817, Shelley speaks of Supreme Being and Deity, not, as heretofore, of *Power*. He declares that he does not speak against the Supreme Being itself, but against the erroneous and degrading idea which men have conceived of a Supreme Being. In the first half of the first canto he distinctly and magnificently develops a sort of Manicheism. Two spirits, the good and the evil, are struggling for the supreme sway. The evil spirit is still predominant ; but each successive combat finds him weaker and the good stronger than heretofore. The final issue shall be the perfect triumph of the good and destruction of the evil. This philosophy is yet further expounded in the "Prometheus Unbound," written in 1819. Herein Jupiter, the representative of the Evil spirit, is cast down, and "the tyranny of heaven shall never be reassumed." Herein also Shelley (like Plato, among others, before him) declares that "Almighty God," "Merciful God," made the living world and all that it contains of good ; and the Evil spirit, now

ruling, all the evil—"madness, crime, remorse, hell, or the sharp fear of hell." Scene 3, Act ii., shows the nature-worship fading away. But the most prominent and pervading idea of the poem is Pantheistic. The Good spirit, which at last triumphs, is, indeed, typified in the Titan Prometheus, and not in a man; but no faith in or worship of this deliverer is required from men who would be saved. The Universal Mind is freed and purified; the earth and the moon grow more glorious, and fertile, and beautiful, inspired by the renewed health of the informing spirit. The poem is an apotheosis of the One Infinite Soul, self-subsisting, informing all things, one and the same in all masks of man, and beast, and worm, and plant, and slime. The conclusion of the "Sensitive Plant," written in 1820, puts forth somewhat hesitatingly a species of transcendental idealism, which there is no space here for considering.

We now come to the poems written in 1821, the year before his death.

"Hellas" (in the wonderful chorus commencing, "Worlds on worlds are rolling ever, from creation to decay") contains a noble recognition of the character of Jesus Christ, a recognition much more decided than that in the First Act of the Prometheus. It also contains, in the speeches of Ahasuerus to Mahmud, one of the two grandest assertions of Idealism with which I am acquainted; the other is developed in his "Ode to Heaven," written in 1819. It is pure Berkeleyan philosophy, with the Kantian extension—that space and time are merely necessary forms of human thought, and have no existence separate from the human mind. Having no room for these passages

*in extenso*, I refrain from injuring them by fragmentary citation.

From the "Adonais," I must quote a little, in order to show what Pantheism pervades it. He asserts of the dead Keats :—

"He is a portion of the loveliness  
Which once he made more lovely : he doth bear  
His part, while the one Spirit's plastic stress  
Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there  
All new successions to the forms they wear ;  
Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight  
To its own likeness, as each mass may bear ;  
And bursting, in its beauty and its might,  
From trees, and beasts, and men, into the Heaven's light."

And, again :—

"The One remains, the many change and pass ;  
Heaven's light for ever shines, Earth's shadows fly ;  
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,  
Until Death tramples it to fragments.—Die  
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek !"

And, finally :—

"That Light, whose smile kindles the Universe,  
That Beauty, in which all things work and move,  
That Benediction, which the eclipsing curse  
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love,  
Which through the web of being blindly wove  
By man, and beast, and earth, and air, and sea,  
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of  
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,  
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality."

Such doctrine as is expressed and implied in these lines differs little from what is called pure Theism.



It simply dwells so continually on the Infinity of God as to overlook, or slightly regard His Personality: it is Spiritualism and Theism, but of the Greeks rather than the Hebrews. The fact is that Shelley, like every other brave Recusant, is credited with much more infidelity than he really had. Finding a vast State Church, based upon politico-theology, everywhere in the ascendant, he was naturally more occupied in negating dominant assumptions than in affirming his own positive convictions. If a man asserts his right to crush me under his feet, it is not probable that my reply will contain an exact recognition of whatever wisdom and goodness he may really have.

So much for formulas: but, of course, we are agreed that Shelley's real religious character consisted in his unquenchable love and reverence for all holiness, truth, and beauty. He believed so much more than the generality of us, he strove with so unusual an ardour to realise his belief in his life, that he is necessarily accounted an infidel and semi-maniac by the great majority.

"I never knew that time in England, when men of truest religion were not counted sectaries. . . . Certainly, if ignorance and perverseness will needs be national and universal, then they who adhere to wisdom and to truth are not therefore to be blamed for being so few as to seem a sect or faction." Which are two sentences of (John Milton's) "Eikonoklastes."  
—Your sincere Friend,

B. V.

## NOTICE OF "THE LIFE OF SHELLEY"

BY JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS

(*"English Men of Letters" Series*)

WE have departed from the order in which we at first intended to notice these books,\* having held back Scott that he might follow Burns, and Shelley that he might follow Spenser. The author of the "Prometheus Unbound," like the author of the "Faërie Queene," has been acclaimed the poet of poets. Spenser was immediately accepted and rated at his true worth by all the noblest of his time, whose memories live amongst the noblest of all time. Shelley was despised and rejected by his own generation and even by that which followed it, but his cyclic day was bound to come, and rapid and splendid has been its development since the first faint flush of its dawning. Men and women who in their youth, thirty, or perhaps even twenty years past, cherished a lonely enthusiasm for him—lonely so far as converse and reading could make them aware, though, doubtless, there are always seven thousand in Israel who have never bowed the knee to the dominant Baal—discover not without astonish-

\* This review formed one of a number of notices of the various works included in the "English Men of Letters" Series.

ment that he whom they worshipped in secret is no longer execrated or contemned by their people, but is actually advanced to a lofty place in the national Pantheon, that it is no longer a distinction good or bad to burn incense at his shrine.

The simple facts that he has been chosen as one of the earliest subjects in a series whose avowed chief end is popularity, and that already, as we write, the Monograph on him is advertised as in its sixth thousand, prove how enormously he has risen in public interest and estimation during this second half of our century. We have ample corroboration of this in the two critical editions of his poems, with elaborate memoir, by Mr. W. M. Rossetti, in that of Mr. H. B. Forman, in the cheap reprint of "Poems and Prose Works" by Mr. R. H. Shepherd, in the various recent popular editions and selections of his poems; in the numerous articles on him, biographical and critical, among which we may specify those by Mr. R. Garnett, the late T. L. Peacock (to whom so many of Shelley's best letters from Italy were addressed), Miss Mathilde Blind, Prof. T. Spencer Bayne, and Mr. Swinburne; and in such works as Trelawny's "Records" (the new enlarged edition of the "Recollections"), Robert Browning's introduction to the Pseudo-Letters (and his superb *Memorabilia*, in "Men and Women"), Mr. Garnett's "Relics, Lady Shelley's "Memorials," and the late Mr. D. F. M'Carthy's "Early Life."

Yet, notwithstanding all the Shelley literature thus glanced at, a clear place was left, and a distinct need existed, for such a popular booklet as the present, treating comprehensively, though succinctly, the life

and work of the poet. Rossetti's "Memoir," as yet the richest collection of biographical materials from all sources, is bound up with his critical edition of the poems; Hogg's "Life" is but a fragment, and, unfortunately, far less trustworthy than brilliant, if not in the general impression, at any rate in many of the details it gives of Shelley at Oxford, and after his expulsion; Medwin's "Life" (1847) is sketchy and inaccurate, and not easily accessible; Lady Shelley's "Memorials" are distinctly ancillary; M'Carthy's "Early Life" is mainly concerned with the Dublin episode; the articles by Peacock and Garnett only discuss particular points of interest; and brave Trelawny's graphic "Recollections" relate to no more than the last half-year of Shelley's life; while the poems are rarely accompanied by the prose works, including the magnificent "Defence of Poetry," the translations, and the letters from Italy to Peacock, of which last Mr. Symonds says: "Taken altogether, they are the most perfect specimens of descriptive prose in the English language;" with which verdict we shall scarcely disagree, remembering that they are real letters, and not elaborate compositions like those whereby Ruskin has added glory to our glorious mother-tongue.

Matters being in this state, it is evident that a cheap and handy volume, drawing from all these dispersed and fragmentary and comparatively dear contributions a clear and truthful outline of the whole life and work of Shelley, was really much wanted; and we, therefore, give hearty welcome to the present work, which undertakes, and, in our opinion, very successfully, to satisfy this want. Mr. Symonds is well

known as an accomplished scholar and writer, of liberal sympathies with all that is beautiful in nature and art; and he reveals himself as an old lover of Shelley in noting that when he was a Harrow boy he picked up two uncut copies of "Laon and Cythna" (unperverted original of the "Revolt of Islam") at a Bristol book-shop. As for the spirit in which Mr. Symonds writes of Shelley, we can scarcely better praise it than by saying that it is as nearly as possible directly opposed to the spirit in which Professor Shairp writes of Burns.

In the limits of our space we could not, even were it desirable, accompany Mr. S. through his narrative and criticisms. We may, however, say a very few words on a very few of the still-vexed questions concerning Shelley. And here it must be remarked that while, in discussing such questions, Mr. S. usually starts with a deferential, though by no means very ardent, support of authority or the world's opinion, his natural clear-sightedness and rectitude and love of liberty generally constrain him before he is done into a virtual though unavowed vindication of Shelley.

1. The expulsion from Oxford for the (then unproved) authorship of the two-paged tract, "The Necessity of Atheism;" Shelley then in his nineteenth year. Mr. S. begins by defending the authorities against the charges of unfair dealing in this matter. But what does he say for and of them in the course of his palliation?—he himself being not only an *unexpelled* University man, like many others who have argued this business against Shelley, but an Oxford man and the author of a prize poem.

Read pp. 36, 37: “But it must be remembered that he despised the Oxford dons with all his heart; and they were probably aware of this. *He was a dexterous, impassioned reasoner, whom they little cared to encounter in argument on such a topic.* . . . Nor was it to be expected that the champion and apostle of atheism should be unmolested in his propaganda by the aspirants to fat livings and ecclesiastical dignities. . . . At the beginning of this century the learning and the manners of the Oxford dons were at a low ebb; and the Fellows of University College acted harshly but not altogether unjustly, ignorantly but after their kind, in this matter of Shelley’s expulsion. *Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda e passa.* “They are not worth speaking about; look at them and pass on;” the most contemptuous line in all Dante; for the miserables in limbo who have never really lived, the neutrals rejected by hell as by heaven, who envy even the positive tortures of the deeper damned, who are hateful to God and to the enemies of God! Call you that backing of your friends? A plague on such backing! they might well exclaim. We are not concerned here with Shelley’s opinions; but as mere outsiders, who have no *Alma Mater* to look back upon either with gratitude or contempt, we may remark that a university which has no other discipline at command for sceptical or heretical pupils than expulsion, proclaims its own utter incapacity for the duties it undertakes to fulfil in the guidance and education of youth. Try to fancy one of the old teachers, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno, or any other, driving away a pupil who propounded

doubts and difficulties, instead of attempting to clear up and solve them ! *Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda e passa !*

2. The relations between Shelley and his father. Mr. S. writes, p. 44 : " I agree with Shelley's last and best biographer, Mr. W. M. Rossetti, in his condemnation of the poet's behaviour as a son." But read some of his other sentences bearing on this subject : " We only know that in his early boyhood Shelley loved his father so much as to have shown unusual emotion during his illness on one occasion, but that, while at Eton, he [Shelley] had already become possessed by a dark suspicion concerning him [his father]. This is proved by the episode of Dr. Lind's visit during his fever. Then and afterwards he expected monstrous treatment at his [father's] hands, although the elder gentleman was nothing worse than a muddle-headed squire." In fact, Shelley believed that his father intended to put him in a madhouse (p. 17). Again, p. 5 : " Mr. Timothy Shelley was in no sense of the word a bad man ; but he was everything which the poet's father ought not to have been. . . . His morality, in like manner, was purely conventional, as may be gathered from his telling his eldest son [Shelley] that he would never pardon a *mésalliance*, but that he would provide for as many illegitimate children as he chose to have." Yet young Oxford accounts Mr. Timothy in no sense of the word a bad man ; but Shelley must have felt as outraged and disgusted as was Marius in *Les Misérables* at a similar hint from his well-to-do relative of *l'ancien régime*. After the expulsion from Oxford, the father forbade his return home, and cut

off supplies, and after the *mésalliance* with Harriet Westbrook (a sort of compromise having been patched up in the meantime) he did the same. Afterwards (p. 53), "Mr. Timothy Shelley was anxious to bind his erratic son down to a settlement of the estates, which, on his own death, would pass into the poet's absolute control. . . . He proposed to make him an immediate allowance of £2000 [per annum] if Shelley would but consent to entail the land on his heirs male. This offer was indignantly refused. Shelley recognised the truth that property is a trust far more than a possession, and would do nothing to tie up so much command over labour, such incalculable potentialities of social good or evil, for an unborn being of whose opinions he knew nothing." Finally, we learn from Lady Shelley's "Memorials," that Sir Timothy proposed to relieve Shelley's widow from her poverty if she would resign her infant son, the heir to the title and estates, the present Sir Percy Florence Shelley, into his absolute charge; which offer also was indignantly refused, she preferring to earn a hard livelihood with her pen.

3. The separation from Harriet, his first wife. Mr. S. says, p. 81: "That Shelley must bear the responsibility of this separation seems to me quite clear." Yet in the note, previous page, he states: "Leigh Hunt, 'Autob.,' p. 236, and Medwin, however, both assert that it was by mutual assent." And on this same p. 81: "It must be added that the Shelley family, in their memorials of the poet, and through their friend, Mr. Richard Garnett, inform us, without casting any slur on Harriet, that documents are extant which will completely vindicate the poet's



conduct in this matter. It is, therefore, but just to await their publication before pronouncing a decided judgment." To which we may add that we are at a loss to divine why their publication is delayed so long after the death of Harriet's daughter.

We wished to say something on two or three other points, as on the judgment of Lord Eldon depriving Shelley of the custody of his children by Harriet after her suicide (pp. 93, 94), and on the assumption (pp. 182, 183) that his practical career was a failure, an assumption, as we understand it, which we certainly cannot concede; but space fails us. In conclusion, we have but to state that, in our judgment, Mr. Symonds' book fairly reaches the high-water mark of cultivated and liberal appreciation of Shelley, as poet and as man, in the present time. The ultimate appreciation cannot be yet: for Shelley's fame and influence are still crescent, his cyclic day is still far from its noon; the poet of the distant future must culminate in the epoch to which he properly belongs. His own lofty words in the "Defence of Poetry" are decidedly applicable to himself, if not to all his illustrious predecessors and contemporaries: "Even in modern times, no living poet ever arrived at the fulness of his fame; the jury which sits in judgment upon a poet, belonging as he does to all time, must be composed of his peers; it must be impanneled by time from the selectest of the wise of many generations."

We may note, by way of postscript, that there are a few slight slips of the pen, which Mr. Symonds might as well correct on revision. Thus, in some of the sentences quoted, our readers will have marked

the ambiguities of *he*, *his*, and *him*. On p. 77, there is confusion in the comparison of *inner circle*, *centre*, and *middle*; p. 83, "the language used by Lady Shelley and Mr. Garnett *justify* us," should, of course, be *justifies*; 95, two spots are named as *the birthplace* of the "Prometheus Unbound;" 143, "*No* criticisms upon Shelley's works are half so good as his own," should be *No other*.

## A STRANGE BOOK\*

### I

IN order to make clear how strange is this book, I must cite at considerable length from the Note which concludes it, but really serves as a Preface :—

“The history of this little volume may be told in a few words.

“It is written by a new method, partly explained in the title, *Improvisations*.

“Last autumn my attention was particularly directed to the phenomena of drawing, speaking, and writing by Impression ; and I determined to make an experiment of the kind, in composition, myself. The following poems are the result. Let me now explain more precisely what is meant by Writing by Impression, so far as my own personal experience is concerned ; for I cannot refer to any other.

\* “Improvisations from the Spirit” [by James John Garth Wilkinson]: 1857. Now long out of print ; only to be got, when it can be got, second-hand.

[It gives me great pleasure to reprint this essay, partly because I presented the author with the copy of the “Strange Book” which he used while writing the article—but chiefly because it will henceforth be impossible for any one making any pretensions to literary culture to inquire, as the critic of a high-class periodical actually did, when reviewing a former work of Thomson’s, “Who is Garth Wilkinson?” This gentleman actually cited Thomson’s admiration for Wilkinson as a proof of his critical incompetence ! I fancy that henceforth any one who displays his ignorance of Wilkinson’s writings will hardly be accepted as a competent critic of English literature.—EDITOR.]

"A theme is chosen and written down. So soon as this is done, the first impression upon the mind which succeeds the act of writing the title is the beginning of the evolution of that theme, no matter how strange or alien the word or phrase may seem. That impression is written down: and then another, and another, until the piece is concluded. An Act of Faith is signalised in accepting the first mental movement, the first word that comes, as the response to the mind's desire for the unfolding of the subject.

"However odd the introduction may be, I have always found it lead by an infallible instinct into the subject.

"The depth of treatment is in strict proportion to the warmth of heart, elevation of mind, and purity of feeling existing at the time—in other words, in proportion to the conditions of Love and Faith.

"Reason and will are not primary powers in this process, but secondary; not directive, but regulative: and imagination, instead of conceiving and constructing, only supplies words and phrases piecemeal; or however much it receives, it is as a disc on which the subject is projected, not as an active concipient organ. Another power flows in; and all the known faculties lend their aid to make way for it. Those faculties are indeed employed in *laissez faire* in its inward intensity; which is another name for Faith.

"*Laissez faire* in the present state of the world, is so active a vortex, and so fiery, that few persons dare to see its consequences. All men will see them though, because Providence comes in with marvels wherever self succumbs itself.

"In placing reason and will in the second place, it is indispensable for man, whose highest present faculties these are, to be well assured what is put in the first place. Hence, writing from an Influx which is really out of your self, or so far within your self, as to amount to the same thing, is either a religion or a madness. I know of no third possibility. In allowing your faculties to be directed to ends they know not of, there is only one Being to whom you dare entrust them—only the Lord. Of consequence, before writing by influx, your prayer must be to Him, for His guidance, influx, and protection. And you must have faith that that prayer is answered, according to your worthiness, in that which flows in. The Faith is the acknowledgment of the gift, which becomes an ever-enlarging cup for receiving fresh gifts or fresh Influx. . . .

"This little volume, which I neither value nor undervalue, is one man's earliest essay to receive with upstretched palms some of these long-travelling, most-unnoticed, and yet unchangeable and immortal rays. It was given just as the reader reads it—with no hesitation, without the correction of one word from beginning to end; and how much it differs from other similar collections *in process* it were difficult to convey to the reader; suffice it to say that every piece was produced without premeditation or preconception: had these processes stolen in, such production would have been impossible. The longest pieces in the volume occupied from thirty to forty-five minutes.\*

"Altogether about fifty hours of recreation, after days not unlaborious, are here put in print. The production was attended by no feeling and by no fervour, but only by an anxiety of all the circumstant faculties, to observe the unlooked-for evolution, and to know what would come of it. For the most part, the full import of what was written was not obvious until one or more days had elapsed: the process of production seemed to put that of appreciation in abeyance.

"Many of the poems are written by Correspondences, as Swedenborg terms the relations which natural objects bear to spiritual life; or to the varieties of Love, which is the grand object of all. Hence it is the readers of Swedenborg who will best understand this class of poems."

There are three important things left vague in this otherwise admirably clear account of the genesis of these poems. Dr. Wilkinson writes: "A theme is chosen and written down," but does not state whether chosen by himself or another. There are certain cases in which lines of introduction to the pieces appear to indicate that the theme was not really chosen, but was passively accepted from the "Spirit," in the same way as the piece itself. Thus, p. 20:—

\* The poem called "The Second Völuspá" (pronounced Völyspou), the longest in the book, occupied from fifty to sixty minutes. As a rule it requires twice as long to copy a poem as to write one.  
—*Author's Note.*

“ Lord, is there special theme this eve,  
 That spirit-muse were well to weave?  
 “ The birth of Adam is the first,  
 That hath within the day been nursed :  
 Take it unto thee ; let it burst  
 Its spirit-bud, and watch the flower  
 That riseth in the gauzy hour.”

Where the second section is the direct answer of “ the Lord ” to the inquiry of the first two lines. Again p. 24 :—

“ Q. Lord, shall I other song achieve?  
 A. Yea : the next song is BIRTH OF EVE.”

And again, p. 37 :—

“ Lord, give me spirit-song to-night,  
 And give the theme I should indite.  
 “ Thou shalt sing well, if faith be true,  
 And LIFE the theme is given you.”

Certain other themes appear to be really chosen, but whether or not by the writer himself is left indefinite. Thus, p. 8 :—

“ Lord, shew me PATIENCE from the spirit ground :  
 That I may know its holy temper's round.”

Where the petition is for Divine inspiration on a specified subject. Again, p. 312 :—

“ THE BIRTHDAY OF THE HUMAN SOUL.  
 “ Can it be given  
 In stanzas seven?  
 Yea, in seven stanzas it shall roll.”

By far the greater number of the pieces have no such introduction ; several have for motto a Bible

text; while in many cases the themes appear to be the choice of the writer, being concerned with his family and friends, or such as would be naturally suggested by his studies. Thus we have "W. M. W.," beginning, "Brownness of autumn is around thee, brother;" "A little message for my wife" (to whom the volume is dedicated); "M. J. W. : her tenth birthday;" "E. M. N.;" "William S.;" "Mary S.;" and of the latter class, "Hahnemann;" "Mesmer;" "Turner : Painter : His State;" "Turner : Painter : His Art;" "Thorvaldsen;" "Tegnér;" "Immanuel Kant;" "Charles Fourier;" "Dalton;" "Berzelius : his Laboratory;" "Chatterton;" "Edgar Allan Poe;" "Charlotte Brontë;" "John Flaxman;" "The tears of Swedenborg." In connection with this last title it may be remarked that several of the pieces, though not entitled "Tears," have verses affixed so specifying them. Thus, at the end of "Patience" :—

" Herbert's sphere  
Beareth here  
Patience tear," &c.

At the end of "Sand-Eating" :—

" It is the sphere  
Of Cowper's tear."

At the end of "The Proud hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Mark, The Proud; not The Fool) :—

" It is the sphere  
Of Shelley's tear,  
That wanders by  
In fruitless sigh,  
And asks the wind  
To ease his mind."

Secondly, we are not told over what period of time the "about fifty hours" of these writings from dictation of "the spirit" were scattered. The Note, which serves as Preface, is dated June 3, 1857, and states that the writer (he would not consent to be termed the author) determined to make the experiment "last autumn;" but we are not informed when the poems were finished, how long before the date of the Note. This point is of importance in relation to the question, Does "the spirit" require intervals of repose, like a mere human author, between the efforts of composition?—though if such intervals were required, it would be quite open to the amanuensis to attribute the need of them to his own weakness and exhaustion, and not to any weariness or fluctuation of power in the dictating "Spirit" itself.

Thirdly, the Note does not tell whether the pieces are printed in the order in which they were written. This point also is of importance, as bearing upon the questions, Does the dictation of "the spirit" tend to more and more sweetness and light, or to more and more wildness and gloom, or does it continue equable? But here again, supposing manifest a lack of progress, or even a steadily progressive deterioration, it is quite competent to the medium to allege his own frailty and fatigue, while refusing to admit either in "the spirit;" though in this case he is exposed to the fair inference that the longer a man practises self-abnegation and openness to the "Divine influx," the more lucid and lovely and beautiful should become his expression or communication thereof. It appears to me that most of the best pieces, the most



limpid and spontaneous, are in the earlier part of the book, and I incline to think that they were also among the earliest written.

Before proceeding to discuss the writer's account of the genesis of these poems, it may be well, in vindication of my serious and respectful treatment of this volume, to cite the verdict of an eminent and unprejudiced living poet and painter (his poems I can speak of as having read them; his pictures I must take on trust, as unfortunately he will not exhibit). In his supplementary chapter to the then late Alexander Gilchrist's "Life of William Blake" (1863), Mr. Dante Gabriel Rossetti writes thus (vol. i. p. 382):—

"A very singular example of the closest and most absolute resemblance to Blake's poetry may be met with (if only one *could* meet with it), in a phantasmal sort of little book, published, or perhaps not published but only printed [I learn at the office of the Swedenborg Society, 36 Bloomsbury Street, London, that it really was published, as the title-page and the price, 5s., stamped on the back indicate], some years since, and entitled 'Improvisations of [from] the Spirit.' It bears no author's name, but was written by Dr. J. J. Garth Wilkinson, the highly gifted editor of Swedenborg's writings, and author of a 'Life' of him, to whom, as has been before mentioned, we owe a reprint of the poems in Blake's 'Songs of Innocence and Experience.' These improvisations profess to be written under precisely the same kind of spiritual guidance, amounting to abnegation of personal effort in the writer, which Blake supposed to have presided over the production of his 'Jerusalem,' &c. The little book has passed into the general (and in all other cases richly deserved) limbo of the modern 'spiritualist' muse. It is a very thick little book, however unsubstantial its origin, and contains, amid much that is disjointed or hopelessly obscure (but then why be the polisher of poems for which a ghost, and not even your own ghost, is alone responsible?), many passages of a remote and charming beauty, or sometimes of a grotesque figu-

rative relation to things of another sphere, which are startlingly akin to Blake's writings—could pass, in fact, for no one's but his. Professing, as they do, the same new kind of authorship, they might afford plenty of material for comparison and bewildered speculation, if such were in any request."

With regard to the last parenthesis in the above passage, it should be observed that both Blake and Wilkinson would scornfully reject the term ghosts in connection with the sources of their inspiration, both holding steadfastly that the spiritual body is as real and in its own sphere as substantial as the natural body, that the spiritual life is far more intensely and profoundly (or supernally) real than the natural. Blake, with all his profusion of visions, saw but one "ghost" in his life (the famous "ghost of a flea," drawn for John Varley, water-colour painter and astrologer, was the visionary personification of the creature); and he, who was more familiar with "angels" and "spirits" than with his fellow-men, found this one "ghost" so horrible that he fairly fled out of the house from it; \* and Dr. Wilkinson, as the title of his book and the account of its origin show, claims to be the medium of *the* Spirit or the Lord; though, indeed, as in "E. B.," "A Wife's Message," "Teddy's Flower," he sometimes believes himself the transmittor of communications from human spirits; but, as I have said,

\* Life, i. 128. "When talking on the subject of ghosts, he was wont to say they did not appear much to imaginative men, but only to common minds, who did not see the finer spirits. A ghost was a thing seen by the gross bodily eye, a vision by the mental" (*Ibid.*). His one ghost appeared thus: "Standing one evening at his garden door in Lambeth, and chancing to look up, he saw a horrible grim figure, 'scaly, speckled, very awful,' stalking downstairs towards him. More frightened than ever before or after, he took to his heels and ran out of the house."

these are in no sense "ghostly" to him, but intensely living spirits, with bodies of spiritual or supereminent reality.

In connection with the "most absolute resemblance," amounting almost to identity, of these poems and Blake's ("startlingly akin to Blake's writings—could pass, in fact, for no one's but his"), as read by so competent a student as Mr. Rossetti, it is interesting to consider certain passages in Dr. Wilkinson's Preface to his edition [the first *printed* one, as the poor Blake had to engrave his text as well as his designs] of the "Songs of Innocence and Experience:" though, as this was published so far back as 1839, when the editor was but twenty-seven years old, his estimate of Blake may have become very different by the time the "Improvisations" were issued in 1857, and may be yet more different now, especially after the publication of the "Life and Selections," the "Essay" by Mr. Swinburne, and the Aldine edition of the Poems, with Prefatory Memoir, by Mr. W. M. Rossetti. Dr. Wilkinson, forty years back, fully appreciated the beauty of the poems he edited: why else should he have edited them? But in my judgment he should have included several more in the praise he lavished on these. He writes:—

"The present volume contains nearly all that is excellent in Blake's poetry; and great, rare, and manifest is the excellence that is here. The faults are equally conspicuous, and he who runs may read them. They amount to an utter want of elaboration, and even, in many cases, to an inattention to the ordinary rules of grammar. Yet the 'Songs of Innocence,' at least, are quite free from the dark becloudment which rolled and billowed over Blake in his later days. He here transcended Self, and escaped from the isolation which Self involves; and, as it then

ever is, his expanding affections embraced universal man, and, without violating, beautified and hallowed even his individual peculiarities. Accordingly, many of these delicious lays belong to the Era as well as to the Author. They are remarkable for the transparent depth of thought which constitutes true simplicity—they give us glimpses of all that is holiest in the childhood of the world and the individual—they abound with the sweetest touches of that pastoral life, by which the Golden Age may be still visibly represented to the Iron one—they delineate full-orbed age, ripe with the seeds of a second infancy, which is 'the Kingdom of Heaven.' The latter half of the volume, comprising the 'Songs of Experience,' consists, it is true, of darker themes; but they, too, are well and wonderfully sung, and ought to be preserved, because, in contrastive connection with the 'Songs of Innocence,' they do convey a powerful impression of 'THE TWO CONTRARY STATES OF THE HUMAN SOUL.'"

But what of the later illustrated works, the colossal or monstrous chaotic "Prophetic Books," which yet contain germs of such noble grandeur and beauty that so fervid a lover and consummate a master of pure classical form as Mr. Swinburne dedicates a large portion of a volume to their exposition? Dr. Wilkinson says that Blake "naturalised the spiritual, instead of spiritualising the natural;" that he preferred "seeing truth under the loose garments of typical or even mythologic representation, rather than in the Divine-Human Embodiment of Christianity;" and continues in a very powerful, though in my judgment too vehement, passage, which I must cite at full length, the slender book being so little known and so scarce:—

"And, accordingly, his Imagination, self-divorced from a Reason which might have elevated and chastened it, and necessarily spurning the scientific daylight and material realism of

the nineteenth century,\* found a home in the ruins of ancient and consummated Churches, and imbued itself with the superficial obscurity and ghastliness, far more than with the inward grandeur of primeval times. For the true Inward is one and identical, and if Blake had been disposed to see it, he would have found that it was still (though doubtless under a multitude of wrappings) extant in the present age. On the contrary, copying the outward form of the past, he has delivered to us a multitude of new hieroglyphics, which contain no presumable reconditeness of meaning, and which we are obliged to account for, simply by the artist's having yielded himself up, more thoroughly than other men *will* do, to those fantastic impulses which are common to all mankind, and which saner men subjugate, but cannot exterminate. In so yielding himself, the Artist, not less than the man, was a loser, though it unquestionably gave him a certain power, as all unscrupulous *passion* must, of wildness and fierce vagary. This power is possessed, in different degrees, by every human being, if he will but give loose and free vent to the hell that is in him; and hence the madness, even of the meanest, is terrific. But no madness can long be considered either really Poetic or Artistical. Of the worst aspect of Blake's genius it is painful to speak. In his 'Prophesies of America,' his 'Visions of the Daughters of Albion,' and a host of unpublished drawings [the "Prophetic Books" have words as well as designs], earth-born might has banished the heavenlier elements of Art, and exists combined with all that is monstrous and diabolical. In the domain of Terror he here entered, the characteristic of his genius is fearful Reality. He embodies no Byronisms—none of the sentimentalities of civilised vice—but delights to draw evil things and evil beings in their naked and final state. The effect of these delineations is greatly heightened by the antiquity which is engraven on the faces of those who do and suffer in them. We have the impression that we are looking down into the hells of the ancient people, the Anakim, the Nephilim, and the Rephaim. Their human forms are gigantic petrifications, from which the fires of

\* Blake was born 28th (20th, according to Mr. Swinburne) November, 1757, and died 12th August, 1827. But the mass of his "Prophetic Books" were produced in the close of the *eighteenth* century, and "Milton" and "Jerusalem" as early as 1804.

lust and intense selfish passion have long dissipated what was animal and vital, leaving stony limbs and countenances expressive of despair and stupid cruelty.

"In many of the characters of his mind, Blake resembled Shelley. From the opposite extremes of Christianity and materialism, they both seem, at length, to have converged towards Pantheism, or natural-spiritualism; and it is probable that a somewhat similar self-intelligence, or Ego-theism, possessed them both.\* They agreed in mistaking the forms of truth for the truth itself, and consequently, drew the materials of their works from the ages of type and shadow which preceded the

\* Writing in 1839, Dr. Wilkinson had to trust for his biographical statements to the sketch in Allan Cunningham's "Lives of British Painters." In Gilchrist's Life (1863) there are many passages counter to this opinion of the Doctor's. Thus the accounts of Blake's death (i. 361, 362): "On the day of his death," writes Smith [J. T., the biographer of Nollekens, and a very old friend of Blake], who had his account from the widow, "he composed and uttered songs to his Maker, so sweetly to the ear of his Catherine [his wife—they had no children], that when she stood to hear him, he, looking upon her most affectionately, said, 'My beloved, they are *not mine*. No! they are *not mine*!' He told her they would not be parted; he should always be about her to take care of her. . . . As 'father, mother, aunt, and brother were buried in Bunhill Row, perhaps it would be better to lie *there*. As to service, he should wish for that of the Church of England.' . . . He lay chanting songs to melodies, both the inspiration of the moment, but no longer as of old to be noted down. To the pious songs followed, about six in the summer evening [it was a Sunday], a calm and painless withdrawal of breath, the exact moment almost unperceived by his wife, who sat by his side. A humble female neighbour, her only other companion, said afterwards: 'I have been at the death, not of a man, but of a blessed angel.' . . . On the Wednesday evening one of the small band of his enthusiastic young disciples, in a letter asking another to the funeral, writes: 'He died on Sunday night at six o'clock, in a most glorious manner. He said he was going to that country he had all his life wished to see, and expressed himself happy, hoping for salvation through Jesus Christ. Just before he died his countenance became fair [he was on the verge of the threescore and ten], his eyes brightened, and he burst out into singing of the things he saw in heaven. In truth, he died like a saint, as a person who was standing by him observed.'"

Christian Revelation. The beauty, chasteness, and clear polish of Shelley's mind, as well as his metaphysical irreligion, took him, naturally enough, to the philosophy and theology of the Greeks, where he could at once enjoy the loose dogma of an Impersonal Creator, and have liberty to distribute Personality at will to the beautiful unliving forms of the visible creation. We appeal to the 'Prometheus Unbound,' his consummating work, in proof of this assertion. The visionary tendencies and mysticism of Blake, developing themselves as they did, under the shelter of a religious parentage and education, carried him, on the contrary, to the mythic fountains of an elder time, and his genius, which was too expansive to dwell in classic formalisms, entered into and inhabited the Egyptian and Asiatic perversions of an ancient and true religion. In consequence of these allied deformities, the works of both are sadly deficient in vital heat, and in substantial or practical truth, and fail, therefore, to satisfy the common wants, or to appeal to the universal instincts of Humanity. Self-will in each was the centre of the individual, and self-intelligence the *anima mundi* of the philosopher, and they both imagined that they could chop and change the universe, even to the confounding of life with death, to suit their own creative fancies."

I shall have something to say in the sequel about this passage, which I have not cited as concurring with its judgments. Here I will but quote as a set-off, so far as regards Blake, a couple of preceding sentences:—

"They who would form a just estimate of Blake's powers as an artist have abundance of opportunities of doing so, from his exquisite illustrations to the 'Songs of Innocence,' from his designs to Blair's 'Grave,' Young's 'Night Thoughts,' and the 'Book of Job,' in all of which there are 'glorious shapes, expressing God-like sentiments.'\* These works, in the main, are

\* "Were I to love money, I should lose all power of thought; desire of gain deadens the genius of man. My business is not to gather gold, but to make glorious shapes, expressing God-like sentiments"—Blake's own words. So, speaking of Lawrence and other

not more remarkable for high original genius than they are for sane self-possession, and show the occasional sovereignty of the inner man over the fantasies which obsessed the outer."

The young editor, who so absolutely and violently denounced the visions and prophetic books of Blake, as to speak of ghastliness, hell, madness, monstrous and diabolical, was already an ardent votary of Swedenborg, whom he termed in this same preface, "our great modern luminary." Others have discerned, or thought they discerned, a wonderful similitude between the thus condemned and the thus exalted. For example ("Life," 15, 16), Mr. Gilchrist says:—

"Another still more memorable figure, and a genius singularly german to Blake's own order of mind, the 'singular boy of fourteen,' during the commencement of his apprenticeship, *may*, 'any day have met unwittingly in London streets, or walked beside a placid, venerable, thin man of eighty-four, of erect figure and abstracted air, wearing a full-bottomed wig, a pair of long ruffles, and a curious-hilted sword, and carrying a gold-headed cane—no Vision, still flesh and blood, but himself the greatest of modern Vision-seers—Emanuel Swedenborg by name, who came from Amsterdam to London in August, 1771, and died at No. 26 Great Bath Street, Coldbath Fields, on 29th of March, 1772.' This Mr. Allingham pleasantly suggests, in a note to his

fashionably prosperous artists: "They pity me, but 'tis they are the just objects of pity. I possess my visions and peace; they have bartered their birthright for a mess of pottage." In his note-book he writes:—

"The Angel who presided at my birth  
Said: 'Little creature, formed of joy and mirth,  
Go, love without the help of anything on earth.'"

One more quotation from the "Life": "Another time, Fuseli came in, and found Blake with a little cold mutton before him for dinner, who, far from being disconcerted, asked his friend to join him. 'Ah! by God!' exclaimed Fuseli, 'that is the reason you can do as you like. *Now, I can't do this.*'"



delightful collection of lyrical poems, 'Nightingale Valley' (1860), in which (at last) occur a specimen or two of Blake's verse. The coincidence is not a trivial one. Of all modern men, the engraver's apprentice [Blake] was to grow up the likeliest to Emanuel Swedenborg; already by constitutional endowment and temperament was so; in faculty for theosophic dreaming, for the seeing of visions while broad awake, and in matter-of-fact hold of spiritual things. To *savan* and to artist alike, while yet on earth, the heavens were opened. By Swedenborg's theological writings, the first English editions of which appeared during Blake's manhood, the latter was considerably influenced, but in no slavish spirit. These writings, in common with those of Jacob Boehmen, and of the other select mystics of the world, had natural affinities to Blake's mind, and were eagerly assimilated. But he hardly became a proselyte or 'Swedenborgian' proper [*hardly* !], though his friend Flaxman did."

Now let us see what Blake writes of Swedenborg, to whom he was "the likeliest of all modern men." When thirty-three he brought forth an engraved volume, illustrated in colour, of which Mr. Swinburne thus speaks ("William Blake: A Critical Essay," 1868, p. 204):—

"In 1790 Blake produced the greatest of all his books, a work indeed which we rank as about the greatest produced by the eighteenth century in the line of high poetry and spiritual speculation. The 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell' gives us the high-water mark of his intellect. None of his lyrical writings show the same sustained strength and radiance of mind; none of his other works in verse or prose give more than a hint here and a trace there of the same harmonious and humorous power, of the same choice of eloquent words, the same noble command and liberal music of thought; small things he could do perfectly, and great things often imperfectly; here for once he has written a book as perfect as his most faultless song, as great as his most imperfect rhapsody. His fire of spirit fills it from end to end, but never deforms the body, never sings the surface of the work, as too often in the still noble books of his later life. . . . The

variety and audacity of thoughts and words are incomparable, not less so their fervour and beauty. 'No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings.' This proverb might serve as motto to the book; it is one of many 'Proverbs of Hell,' as forcible and as finished."

In the great work thus greatly praised, Blake incidentally delivers his soul on Swedenborg; but in fairness to Dr. Wilkinson, it must be remarked that he was probably unacquainted with it when he wrote the above-cited preface, as it is not mentioned therein. In one of the "Memorable Fancies" of the book, and in the chapter of Comments succeeding it ("Life," i. 85, 86; more fully, Swinburne, 219, 221), Blake, wishing for such an alacrity in sinking as Falstaff attributed to his size (the which, by the way, we should have thought tended to buoyancy), desiring indeed to sink to about the depth indicated by the illustrious Sir John's, "if the bottom were as deep as hell, I should down"; what enormous dead weight, what irresistible plummet of myriadfold leaden ponderosity, did he take to ensure his descent? Read:—

"... then I flung myself with him directly into the body of the sun; here I clothed myself in white, and taking in my hand [it must have been a large one!] Swedenborg's volumes, sunk from the glorious clime, and passed all the planets till we came to Saturn: here I stayed to rest, and then leaped into the void between Saturn and the fixed stars."

So much for Swedenborg in the Fancy; now for him in the Comments:—

"I have always found that angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise; this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning.

"Thus Swedenborg boasts that what he writes is new, though it is only the contents or index of already published books. . . .

"Now hear a plain fact : Swedenborg has not written one new truth.

"Now hear another : He has written all the old falsehoods.

"And now hear another : He conversed with angels, who are all religious, and conversed not with devils, who all hate religion [angels are really devils, God is the devil, and *vice versa* ; popular religions are blasphemous and atheistic ; here and elsewhere in Blake] ; for he was incapable, through his conceited notions.

"Thus Swedenborg's writings are a recapitulation of all superficial opinions, and an analysis of the more sublime, but no further.

"Hear now another plain fact : Any man of mechanical talents may, from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's ; and from those of Dante or Shakespeare, an infinite number. But when he has done this, let him not say that he knows better than his master, for he only holds a candle in sunshine."

This is mild and sweet with a vengeance. In the "Life" are some extracts from the *Reminiscences* of Mr. Crabb Robinson (based on his *Journals*), who was introduced to Blake at the close of 1825. One of these notes of Blake's conversation (i. 340) modifies the passages just cited :—

"Incidentally, Swedenborg was mentioned : he declared him to be a divine teacher ; he had done, and would do much good ; yet he did wrong in endeavouring to explain to the *reason* what it could not comprehend. He seemed to consider—but that was not clear—the visions of Swedenborg and Dante as of the *same* kind. Dante was the greater poet [rather !]"

The student must elect between these verdicts of the visionary poet-artist, between the judgment of the noblest work of his prime, and the conversation when he was close upon threescore and ten.

Lastly, to complete this interesting little circle of estimates and comparisons, let us hear Mr. Swinburne. He agrees with Dr. Wilkinson, as we learn from several passages in the "Essay," that there are points of strong resemblance in Blake and Shelley. But in the conclusion of his volume (p. 300, *et seq.*), it is not Shelley whom he fixes as the nearest of kin to Blake. Unfortunately space lacks for full quotation :—

"I can remember one poet only whose work seems to me the same or similar in kind—a poet as vast in aim, as daring in detail, as unlike others, as coherent to himself, as strange without and as sane within. The points of contact and sides of likeness between William Blake and Walt Whitman are so many and so grave as to afford some ground of reason to those who preach the transition of souls or transfusion of spirits. The great American is not a more passionate preacher of sexual or political freedom than the English artist. To each the imperishable form of a possible and universal Republic is equally requisite and adorable as the temporal and spiritual queen of ages as of men. To each all sides and shapes of life are alike acceptable or endurable. . . . Both are spiritual, both democratic ; both by their works recall, even to so untaught and tentative a student as I am, the fragments vouchsafed to us of the Pantheistic poetry of the East. Their casual audacities of expression or speculation are in effect well nigh identical. Their outlooks and theories are evidently the same on all points of intellectual and social life. The divine devotion and selfless love which make men martyrs and prophets are alike visible and palpable in each. It is no secret now, but a matter of public knowledge, that both these men, being poor in the sight and the sense of the world, have given what they had of time or of money, of labour or of love, to comfort and support all the suffering and sick, all the afflicted and misused, whom they had the chance or the right to succour and to serve. And in externals and details the work of these two constantly and inevitably coheres and coincides. . . . Whitman has seldom struck a note of thought and speech so just and so profound as Blake has now and then touched upon ; but his work is generally more frank and fresh, smelling of

sweeter air, and readier to expound or expose its message, than this of the prophetic books. Nor is there among these any poem or passage of equal length so faultless and so noble as his 'Voice out of the Sea,' or his dirge over President Lincoln—the most sweet and sonorous nocturn ever chanted in the church of the world. But in breadth of outline and charm of colour these poems recall the work of Blake; and to neither poet can a higher tribute of honest praise be paid than this."

## II

The foregoing extracts, which I certainly should not have made at such length had the books from which they are taken been more generally known or more easily accessible, exhibit one of those complicated disagreements among the doctors over which laymen are wont to chuckle, as feeling the burden of their ignorance very much lightened thereby. In this case, the doctors are the poets and mystics; the laymen, we common prosy readers. Rossetti discovers affinity, verging on identity, of Blake and Wilkinson; Wilkinson repudiates his twin-brother Blake, whom he pairs off with atheistic-pantheistic Shelley; Blake expresses the utmost contempt for Swedenborg, whom his unfraternal twin-brother idolises; Gilchrist pronounces Blake likest of all modern men to the Swedenborg he disdains; Swinburne can almost believe in transmigration of soul from Blake to Walt Whitman, the two are so wonderfully alike. As for Blake and Shelley, although Shelley's thirty years began with the latter half of Blake's seventy, I remember nothing in their memoirs or works to show that either knew aught of the other. It is not for poor me to decide when the doctors

thus disagree; I can but hazard, in all humility, the suggestion that there is much truth if not all the truth, much truth with perchance a little error, in the judgment delivered by each of these learned adepts. With Mr. Rossetti, I find many of Wilkinson's poems, or verses thereof, startlingly akin to some of Blake's, and can often fancy in reading them that I am verily reading Blake; but in many more, especially those due to Wilkinson's scientific and other studies, and those confined in the strait-waist-coat of Swedenborg's arbitrary, dogmatic, rigid, and frigid symbolisms or "Correspondences," I can discover very few hints of Blake: but more on this in the sequel. With Wilkinson I perceive much likeness between Blake and Shelley, and only wonder that he does not note (as Swinburne does in several places) certain rare and conspicuous identical traits: their dauntless devotion to political and religious liberty; their impassioned and yet more daring advocacy of sexual freedom; their reanimation and ardent propagation\* of the great doctrine, in its essence so profoundly true, that in the appalling unintermitted struggle between the spirits of good and evil, the evil has hitherto prevailed, that the God

\* Each supremely in his supreme work—Blake in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," Shelley in the "Prometheus Unbound," though both elsewhere in their writings, as in the splendid opening of "Laon and Cythna" ("Revolt of Islam"), and Blake's "Everlasting Gospel"—

"Both read the Bible day and night,  
But thou read'st black where I read white."

As Mr. Swinburne says, p. 190: Blake "believed in redemption by Christ, and in the incarnation of Satan as Jehovah." For Christ read Prometheus, for Jehovah read Jupiter, and you have the same belief in Shelley, expressed in classical instead of biblical names.

of the popular worship is the real devil, and the devil of the popular abhorrence the real Divine Saviour of humanity; that Ormuzd shall ultimately conquer and annihilate or absorb Ahriman, as in the apocalyptic vision of the "Prometheus Unbound."

But it is time to return to our strange book, to consider the process of its production, and then try to appraise its worth. Here let me state, once for all, that I have perfect confidence in Dr. Wilkinson's veracity. I have not indeed the honour of his personal acquaintance (I use the conventional phrase in no conventional sense), have indeed seen and heard him but once, when he was upon a public platform, and myself (attracted solely by his name) in the body of the hall; but I do not believe that any one, being neither dishonest nor stupid, can study his great and noble works\* without deriving from them the absolute conviction that their author is quite incapable of falsehood or equivocation. Err he may and must, being human; but we may be sure that his errors are genuine, that he is not conscious of them. Moreover, he is a man of science, a philosopher, and was a doctor of long practice, even in 1857, and thus a trained and experienced observer, specially fitted for discriminating and recording the phenomena of his own being, whether physical or mental. Lastly, he is a man of subtlest insight, of far-reaching vision, of massive and magnificent genius; a man of whom Emerson wrote, not more generously

\* As "The Human Body, and its Connection with Man," 1851, and the introduction to "Swedenborg's Economy of the Animal Kingdom," 1846.

than justly, some years before the publication of these Poems :—

“Swedenborg printed these scientific books in the ten years from 1734 to 1744, and they remained from that time neglected ; now after their century is complete, he has at last found a pupil in Mr. Wilkinson, of London, a philosophic critic, with a coequal vigour of understanding and imagination comparable only to Lord Bacon’s. . . . The admirable preliminary discourses with which Mr. Wilkinson has enriched these volumes, throw all the contemporary philosophy of England into shade, and leave me nothing to say on their proper grounds.”—*Representative Men* : “Swedenborg, or the Mystic.”

“Wilkinson, the editor of Swedenborg, the annotator of Fourier, and the champion of Hahnemann, has brought to metaphysics and to physiology a native vigour, with a catholic perception of relations, equal to the highest attempts, and a rhetoric like the armoury of the invincible knights of old. There is in the action of his mind a long Atlantic roll not known except in deepest waters, and only lacking what ought to accompany such powers, a manifest centrality. If his mind does not rest in immovable biases, perhaps the orbit is larger, and the return is not yet : but a master should inspire a confidence that he will adhere to his convictions, and give his present studies always the same high place.”—*English Traits* : chap. xiv. “Literature.”

Now, most of my readers have probably seen and heard, in common with myself, a bad deal about “Inspirational Discourses,” and many may have heard one or more of such effusions (I have heard but one, from a woman who seemed a cleverish actress) ; and many also have probably seen scraps and screeds of rhyme and the blankest of blank verse, claiming to be improvisations dictated by eminent spirits, Byron, Poe, Cowper, Shelley, and so forth. One has glanced at such things now and then as they happened to come in his way, but never as expecting



to find in them any sane and genuine worth, only with languid contemptuous curiosity, wondering to what depths of nervous disease, idiocy, lunacy, or swindling charlatanism human beings could sink in countries calling themselves civilised, without being committed to the hospital, the asylum, or the gaol: it was so evident that the mediums (this appears to be the approved "spiritist" plural) ranged from diseased and hysterical dupes to deep and damnable deceivers. The spirits of the noblest poets usually dictated such senseless and measureless balderdash (their metre being a gas-metre) that it was clear they had decayed into drivelling imbecile Strulbrugs in the other world. When, very rarely, a very small oasis in a very vast desert, a piece of any merit and melody was discovered, it was not beyond the achievement of a person of ordinary intelligence and education, with a nervous temperament and the "fatal facility" in rhyming. So notoriously silly or worse are the vast majority of such alleged communications, that even Professor Wallace, during the Slade inquiry, said that he was interested only in the question of how the message was written, the message itself being very seldom of any value or significance. And in the exceedingly rare cases where the alleged communications and dictations are not contemptibly worthless or worse than worthless, what assurance have we of the honesty of the medium? The so-called improvisation may have been carefully composed beforehand, by the medium or some other knave cleverer at rhymes; wherefore the saner or less mad world very promptly and properly commits such inspired productions to what Mr. Rossetti calls

“the general and richly deserved limbo of the modern ‘spiritualist’ Muse.”

But while we thus reject with pity or spurn with disgust and disdain the mass of the ignorant, the morbid, the deranged, the cunning, the unscrupulous, the dupes and the deceivers who compose the “Devil’s Own” of equivocal private secretaries attached to the *post-mortem* spirits, we must not forget that among them, not of them, are two or three genuine seers—genuine whether their visions be of realities or not; genuinely inspired, whether their utterances be of truth or error, and whether they attribute their inspiration to its real source or not. We must not confound a Swedenborg with a Home, a Blake with a Slade, a Wilkinson with a “Revd.” Mr. Monk. When we have the good fortune to meet in life, or history, or literature with a great and noble man, let us do our best to study and understand him and his work, however eccentric his life-orbit may be deemed by the world, however startling its aberrations may at first appear to ourselves; nor let us ever fear, rather let us ever be forward to praise, as publicly as we can, all that we find praiseworthy in the man and his work; though our voice calls forth no responsive echo, but a storm of jeers and howls and curses, because the one half of the world has decreed him guilty as a blasphemous infidel, and the other half, more charitable, pronounced him insane.

In carefully and respectfully studying these “Improvisations,” I have but adhered to a rule which I stated in some notes on the poems of William Blake (written in 1864, and published at the beginning of 1866, before the appearance of Mr. Swinburne’s elaborate and

admirable essay); and which, with its corollaries, I may be allowed to repeat here, as I consider it not less applicable to Garth Wilkinson than to William Blake:—

“... we ought not to be kept from studying these writings [the turbid and turbulent prophetic books] by any apparent obscurity and ludicrousness, if we have found in the easily comprehended vernacular writings of the same man (as in Blake's we certainly *have* found) sincerity, and wisdom, and beauty. Nor is it probable that even the most mysterious works of Blake would prove more difficult to genuine lovers of poetry than many works of the highest renown prove to nine-tenths [rather ninety-nine hundredths] of the reading public.

“ ‘ Sie haben dich, heiliger Hafis,  
Die mystische Zunge genannt;  
Und haben, die Wortgelehrten,  
Den Werth des Worts nicht erkannt.’

“For many intelligent persons, Carlyle at his best is almost or quite as unintelligible as if he was using an unknown language; and the same may be asserted of Shelley and Robert Browning. (I do not select lofty *old* names, because in their cases the decisions of authoritative judges, accumulating throughout centuries, overawe our common jurymen into verdicts wise without understanding; so that a dullard can speak securely of the sublimity of Milton, for example, though we are pretty certain that he never got through the first book of the ‘Paradise Lost,’ and that he would find himself in a Slough of Despond, when twenty lines deep in the opening passage of *Samson Agonistes*.) Indeed, I doubt whether it would be an exaggeration to assert that, for a very large majority of those who are accounted educated and intelligent people, poetry in itself is essentially an unknown tongue. They admire and remember a verse or a passage for its wit, its cleverness, its wisdom, its clear and brief statement of some fact, its sentiment, its applicability to some circumstance of their own life, its mention of some classic name, its allusion to some historical event; in short, for its associations, and not for its poetry, *per se*. Yet, assuredly, here are still men in England with an infallible sense for

poetry, however disguised, and however far removed from ordinary associations; men who know Shakespeare in despite of the commentators, and understand Browning in contempt of the critics, and laugh quietly at the current censures and raptures of the reviews: and these men would scarcely consider it a waste of time to search into the meaning of the darkest oracles of William Blake."

And before that last sentence was written, and until after it was printed (as we learn from dates in his volume), one of the youngest and most brilliant of "these men," Mr. Swinburne, was patiently and reverently preparing, "in the intervals of his natural work," that luminous exposition and interpretation of those "darkest oracles," entitled, "William Blake: a Critical Essay."

And now for Dr. Wilkinson's note to these "Improvisations," which has been cited at such length in the opening of the first section of this article. He says: "How much it differs from other similar collections [books of verse] in *process* it were difficult to convey to the reader; suffice it to say, that every piece was produced without premeditation or preconception. Had these processes stolen in, such production would have been impossible." But this does not so sharply distinguish his volume from other volumes of poetry as the doctor appears to imply. Long poems, indeed, are usually premeditated and planned in their general outline;\* but the first conception of the subject, in its most general outline, yet most essential living individuality, must be as unpremeditated, as real a lightning-flash of inspiration

\* In speaking of poetry, poems, and poets, I of course mean only the genuine, whatever their rank; and in such a discussion as this, these terms include all art, works of art, and artists.

as ever suddenly illumined mystic or seer. Moreover, many of the details, whether of episode or organic development, many of the noblest passages, whether for beauty or energy, must be just as unpremeditated, just as unexpectedly inspired. And beyond doubt, many of the loveliest lyrics and brief poems have been poured forth in a single sudden jet, like metal at a white heat in the intolerable fire of inspiration, swift as lightning to smite and fuse, an unforeseen thunderbolt from a quiet sky—without even so much premeditation and preconception as must be implied in Dr. Wilkinson's sitting down with pen in hand and paper before him, and theme chosen, "determined to make an experiment" himself, awaiting the influx of the Spirit.

But without precise premeditation and preconception of any particular poem, there must have been much general premeditation, many more or less vague preconceptions on the part of the poet; there must have been great gathering of fuel for the altar, of fuel and myrrh and frankincense and all sweet spices, awaiting the descent of the fire from heaven—whose descent is certain, though no man can foretell the hour thereof; nor can the sacrificial high-priest himself, perchance worn out with long vain watching, and sick with hope deferred, have the faintest surmise of the time of its coming, until, ere he can perceive it, the heavens are opened, the altar fire is burning, the savours of the incense are floating up the air. Now, so much of general premeditation and preconception, or preparation, as is here asserted to be necessary for the production of every genuine work of art, be it poem, sonata, statue, picture, or

cathedral, Dr. Wilkinson not only admits in himself and in the domain of art, but extends the assertion of its necessity to all mankind and the whole world of human occupations, in a passage of the note now to be cited :—

“In any walk of life, however humble or however high, there are two general requisites for a heavenly development. The first is an unremitting assiduity in all that naturally concerns the subject, the entire knowledge and manipulation and progress of the thing, as far as industry can attain them. This gives the human materials. The second is the heart’s prayer to the Lord for His aid, and the mind’s faith that that prayer is answered in the asking. The resulting actions of the man who brings these materials, and receives by acknowledgment these spirituals, will form a part of the ever-progressive heaven of the special branch, which it is that man’s privilege to be employed to portray.”

Being simply an elaboration of the legendary Cromwellian prescription, “Trust in God, and keep your powder dry.” Coleridge said of Wordsworth’s prose didactic on poetry, “What is true in it is not new, and what is new in it is not true;” and I think the same may be fairly said of Dr. Wilkinson’s theory of Divine inspiration, of the renunciation of self, the subjection of reason and will, the passive faith-full openness to influx; as he expounds it in the note, in the paragraph just cited, and in various others quoted in the last section, as that beginning: “Reason and will are not primary powers in this process, but secondary; not directive, but regulative; and imagination . . . however much it receives is as a disc on which the subject is projected, not as an active concipient organ. Another power flows in, and all the known faculties lend their aid to make

way for it." And this: "Hence, writing from an influx which is really out of your Self, *or so within your Self so as to amount to the same thing* [this pregnant identical alternative is very noteworthy], is either a religion or a madness. I know of no third possibility. [The ancients, we shall see, did ; they recognised it as *both* a religion and a madness, a sacred frenzy ; and moderns, Christian and non-Christian, have thus recognised it also.]\* In allowing your faculties to be directed to ends they know not of, there is only One Being to whom you dare entrust them—only the Lord."

Now, what does all this mean other than the re-assertion of the fundamental principle of all mysticism, in all times and climes?—from the most ancient Indian gymnosophists to the Hebrew prophets and poets, to Christian apostles, as Paul and John, to Plato and Plotinus, to Mohammed and the Sufis, to early and mediæval Christian eremites and saints with their trances and ecstasies, to George Fox and his Quakers, walking by the interior light and waiting to be moved by the Spirit, to Behmen and Law, to Swedenborg and Blake, to Shelley with his opening of "Alastor," his "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," his "Defence of Poetry," his "Ode to

\* As Dr. Wilkinson was, of course, well aware, long before he wrote the "Improvisations." Thus, in his "Emanuel Swedenborg: A Biography" (1849), he writes, p. 234: "Swedenborg's *case* may be studied like any other object of science. . . . Nay, were it *sure* that he was stark mad, it would not dispossess us of one truth or vision in his writings ; these would survive the grave of his *personal* reputation, and bring us back to *the ancient faith, that madness too has a Divine side, and in its natural heedlessness, sparkles with wisdom and prophecy, or even sometimes is interpolated with the directer oracles of God.*"

Liberty." The names and phrases may vary; the essential faith and doctrine is ever the same in all. Let us consider a few instances relating specially to poetry.

First, Plato. *Ion*, the short dialogue between Socrates and the Homeric rhapsodist (or rhapsode, as Professor Jowett prefers) is devoted to insistence on this doctrine of the Divine madness of *poetic inspiration*, the "fine frenzy" of Shakespeare.\* Here is the central exposition, as it were the keystone of the arch. I use Jowett's version; but Shelley also Englished it, Mrs. Shelley strangely avowing, "I do not know why Shelley selected the *Ion* to translate."

"*Soc.* The gift which you possess of speaking excellently about Homer is not an art, but an inspiration; there is a divinity, moving you, like that in the stone which Euripides calls a magnet, but which is commonly known as the stone of Heraclea. For that stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a similar power of attracting other rings; and sometimes you may see a number of pieces of iron and rings suspended from one another, so as to form quite a long chain; and all of them derive their power of suspension from the original stone. Now this, like the Muse, who first of all inspires man herself, and from these inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended, who take the inspiration from them. For all good poets; epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems, not as works of art, but because they are inspired and possessed. And as the Corybantian revellers, when they dance, are not in their right mind, so the lyric poets are not in their right

- \* "The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothings  
A local habitation and a name."



mind when they are composing their beautiful strains ; but when falling under the power of music and metre, they are inspired and possessed—like Bacchic maidens, who draw milk and honey from the rivers, when they are under the influence of Dionysus, but not when they are in their right mind. . . . For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired, and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him ; when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless, and is unable to utter his oracles. . . . Had he learned by rules of art, he would have known how to speak, not of one theme only, but of all ; and, therefore, God takes away the mind of poets, and uses them as His ministers, as He also uses diviners and holy prophets, in order that we who hear them may know that they speak not of themselves, who utter these priceless words in a state of unconsciousness, but that God is the speaker, and that through them He is conversing with us.”

So in the *Meno* :—

“*Soc.* Then we shall also be right in calling those divine whom we were just now speaking of as diviners and prophets, including the whole tribe of poets. Yes, and Statesmen above all may be said to be divine and illumined, being inspired and possessed of God, in which condition they say many good things, not knowing what they say.”

Again, in the “Apology of Socrates” :—

“I went to the poets—tragic, dithyrambic, and all sorts ! . . . Will you believe me ? I am almost ashamed to confess the truth, but I must say, that there is hardly a person present who would not have talked better about their poetry than they did themselves. Then I know, without going further, that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration ; they are diviners or soothsayers, who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them.”

And, again, in the *Phædrus* :—

“*Soc.* But there is also a madness which is the gift of heaven, and the source of the choicest blessings among men.

For prophecy is a madness, and the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dadona, when out of their sense, have conferred great benefits on Hellas, both in public and private life ; but when in their senses, few or none. . . . There is also a third kind of madness, of those who are possessed by the Muses ; which enters into a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyrical and all other numbers, with these adorning the myriad actions of ancient heroes for the instruction of posterity. But he who, having no touch of the Muses' madness in his soul, and comes to the door, and thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art—he, I say, and his poetry, are not admitted ; the sane man is nowhere at all, when he enters into the rivalry with madmen. I might tell of many other deeds which have sprung from inspired madness," &c.

In harmony with this Platonic doctrine are the serious invocations of Divine aid by the loftiest earlier and later poets, though the appeal to the Muses became in the course of centuries so thoroughly senseless a matter of routine with mediocre and clever versifiers, that Byron did well to prick the bubble with the frank impertinence of his "Hail, Muse! *et cetera*.—We left Juan sleeping." Homer, surely in devout earnestness, calls upon the heavenly Muses to sing. Lucretius, the most inspired of Latin poets, serious enough in his opening prayer to Venus Genetrix, "symbol of the all-pervading living force of nature, legendary mother of the Romans," as is made manifest by "the intense earnestness of the language, the words plain and simple in themselves, yet instinct with life and passion" (Munro's second edition, 1866 ; Book i, note 2, vol. i. p. 341, 342). So Dante, in the first canto of the "Purgatory," invokes the sacred Muses, and in the first of the "Paradise," Apollo ; and in the second grandly declares, warning off those unworthy to accompany him, that his barque

takes now to waters never sailed, that Minerva breathes the breeze, Apollo pilots, and the nine Muses are as his compass to point out the north, using indeed the antique names, with that profound and uncritical reverence for the classics which long survived the Renaissance, but evidently meaning, in all earnestness (as commentators have pointed out) by Apollo and the Muses, God and His Holy Spirit, or gifts of grace. So Spenser, when beginning his "Faerie Queene," he supplicates: "Help then, O! holy virgin, chiefe of nyne;" and in the introduction to the last book we have complete: "Ye sacred imps, that on Parnasso dwell." So Milton, opening his "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained," and living at a time when he could shadow the old names; though in his poems the classical and Biblical mythologies are often very confused, calls upon the heavenly Muse and the Holy Spirit.

Finally, let us gather a few sentences from Shelley's noble unfinished "Defence of Poetry," which is pervaded throughout with this doctrine of inspiration, and which suffers cruelly, as all high and harmonious work must in being sampled by fragments.\*

"Language, colour, form, and religious and civil habits of action, are all the instruments and materials of poetry; they may

\* One rejoices in the association of Sir Philip Sidney and Shelley. Their families became allied by the (second) marriage of Shelley's paternal grandfather, Sir Bysshe, to the heiress of Penshurst, their eldest son assuming the name of Shelley-Sidney, and being ancestor of the present master of Penshurst, Lord De L'Isle and Dudley. But Sidney and Shelley were much more closely allied in their supremacy of magnanimous and chivalrous character; and two centuries and a quarter before Shelley wrote the "Defence," Sidney had written "An Apologie for Poetry" (1595; reprinted by Mr. Arber, cost sixpence).

be called poetry by that figure of speech which considers the effect as a synonyme of the cause. But poetry, in a more restricted sense, expresses those arrangements of language, and especially metrical language, which are created by that imperial faculty, whose throne is curtained within the invisible nature of man.\*

"A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. . . .

"In the infancy of the world, neither poets themselves or their auditors are fully aware of the excellence of poetry; for it acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness; and it is reserved for future generations, to contemplate and measure the mighty cause and effect in all the splendour and strength of their union. . . .

"Poetry, and the principle of self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and Mammon of the world. . . .

"Poetry is, indeed, something divine. . . . What were virtue, love, patriotism, friendship; what were the scenery of this beautiful universe which we inhabit; what were our consolations on this side of the grave; and what were our aspirations beyond it, if poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar? Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, I will compose poetry! The greatest poet even cannot say it, for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic, either of its approach or its departure. Could this influence be durable in its original purity and force, it is impossible to predict the greatness of the results; but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet. I appeal to the greatest poet of the present day, whether it is not an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour

\* Wilkinson's "Writing from an Influx, which is really out of your Self, or so far within your Self as to amount to the same thing."

and study. . . . This instinct and intuition of the poetical faculty is still more observable in the plastic and pictorial arts ; a great statue or picture grows under the power of the artist, as a child in the mother's womb ; and the very mind which directs the hand in formation is incapable of accounting to itself for the origin, the gradations, or the media of the process. . . .

"It is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own. . . . Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man. . . .

"Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration ; the mirrors of gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present ; the words which express what they understand not ; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire ; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

So clear and perfect is the unequalled lyrist's response to the ideal philosopher, athwart the abyss of two thousand years.

### III

Thus far we have not found Dr. Wilkinson's process so essentially different from that of the greatest of poets as it appeared to him. We now reach the point where he diverges from the broad high-road leading to the Temple of Fame, and wanders in search of some loftier goal (which may prove but a castle in the air or *Fata Morgana*) by narrow and difficult and seldom-trodden ways. This volume "was given just as the reader reads it ; with no hesitation ; without the correction of one word from beginning to end. . . . The longest pieces in the volume occupied from thirty to forty-five minutes. [With the exception of "The Second Völuspâ," specified in a note, which adds,

"As a rule, it requires twice as long to copy a poem as to write one."] Altogether about fifty hours of recreation, after days not unlaborious, are here put in print. The production was attended by no feeling and no fervour, but only by an anxiety of all the circumstant faculties [reason and imagination, as well as will being held in subjection or passivity during the process], to observe the unlooked for [unforeseen?] evolution, and to know what would come of it."

"The Second Völuspâ," done in 50 or 60 minutes, contains 332 lines, in addition to 17 of rhymed invocations and answers. It is not indeed rhymed (nearly all the rest are), but it is modelled on the old bardic alliterative structure, perhaps less easy than rhymed verses for a modern Englishman to improvise. The next longest pieces, done in from 30 to 45 minutes, contain 128, 136 (two), 144, 152 (four), 156, and 160 lines respectively; some of them rather difficult in construction, abounding in double rhymes, or composed in octaves whose first four lines are rhymed to by the corresponding lines in the second four. The whole body of verse, which occupied "about fifty hours of recreation, after days not unlaborious," fills 395 pages, averaging, I estimate, rather over than under 20 lines a page—say 8000 lines in all, giving an average of about 160 an hour.

Such rapidity of writing, without special premeditation or preconception, is beyond doubt improvisation. Blake would not revise his Prophetic Books, but we know not at what rate they were produced; probably the production was comparatively slow, as the text was engraved with the designs. Shelley, the

most spontaneous and inspired of modern poets, wrote the "Witch of Atlas," 624 lines in the not facile *ottava rima*, in three days; but that was only about as much in a day as Dr. Wilkinson (*p. p.* the Spirit) wrote in an hour. Shelley, interested by the *improvvisatore* Sgricci, tried improvisation himself, dictating the blank verse fragment "Orpheus" to Mrs. Shelley, as we learn from a note of hers on the MS. But however spontaneously Shelley conceived, and however rapidly he wrote the first draught, he, in common with the greatest and most enduring poets (with perhaps the exception of Shakespeare, of whom the players boasted that he never blotted a line; stout Ben Jonson retorting, surely with excellent judgment, "I wish he had blotted a thousand"), carefully revised and corrected, afterwards.\*

The Will and Reason and Imagination were held in abeyance, passive to the Divine influx; the writing was attended by no fervour, no feeling beyond curiosity as to the result of the experiment. Poetry, inspiration, without fervour or feeling, is what I can no more conceive than music without vibration of the instrument and the surrounding air. Why, Sweden-

\* Trelawny, in his "Recollections," tells us of the first draught of the lovely lines, "To a Lady, with a Guitar": "It was a frightful scrawl: words smeared out with his finger, and one upon the other, over and over in tiers, and all run together, 'in most admired disorder.' It might have been taken for a sketch of a marsh overgrown with bulrushes, and the blots for wild ducks, such a dashed-off daub as self-conceited artists mistake for a manifestation of genius. On my observing this to him, he answered: 'When my brain gets heated with thought, it soon boils, and throws off images and words faster than I can skim them off. In the morning, when cooled down, out of the rough sketch (as you justly call it) I shall attempt a drawing.'"

borg himself, the rigid and frigid, who perambulated Heaven and Hell most placidly, self-complacent, with his full-bottomed wig and his gold-headed cane, like a cold-blooded bailiff taking an inventory—even he fell into trances, sometimes of several days' duration, when in the world of spirits, and at other times his eyes shone like fire,\* or he was discovered trembling and ejaculating, and in a great perspiration. And this cold impassibility of Dr. Wilkinson, while possessed by the Spirit, appears the more astonishing, because he is not like his master, an unimpassioned man, with milk or milk and water for blood in his veins; but is, on the contrary, most vehement and fervid, alike in championing his own and in assaulting hostile doctrines. Huxley himself does not strike out harder straight from the shoulder. In suppressing as much as possible his chief natural faculties, he was surely playing an unnatural as well as an illogical part; and with the loss of nature we expect to find

\* "As we have seen already, he sometimes continued in bed for several days together, when enjoying his spiritual trances. He desired Shearsmith [his landlord at 26 Great Bath Street, Coldbath Fields, where he died] never to disturb him at such times, an injunction which was necessary, for the look of his face was so peculiar on these occasions that Shearsmith sometimes feared he was dead."—Wilkinson's "Biography," p. 239.

"One day after dinner the same domestic [his gardener's wife and his housekeeper when he lived near Stockholm] went into his room, and saw his eyes shining with an appearance as of clear fire. She started back, and exclaimed: 'For God's sake what is the matter? You look fearfully!'—'How then do I look?' said he. She told him what she saw. 'Well, well,' said he, 'fear not! The Lord has opened my *bodily* eyes, so that spirits see through them into the world. I shall soon be out of this state, which will not hurt me.' In about half-an-hour the shining appearance left his eyes." *Ibid.*, pp. 226, 227.

For the trembling and great perspiration, see *Ibid.* 152, 153.



loss of power, and with the loss of logical consistency loss of insight and lucidity. If, as he so forcibly lays down, we must do all that industry can do to prepare the human materials for the operation of the Spirit, say the altar and the fuel and the incense for the kindling by the spark from heaven, why should our co-operation cease with the first kindling? why should we not still give all our powers to the fanning of the spark into broad clear flame? Descended into the world of flesh, the spirit is so far subject to worldly conditions that its work can be furthered or hindered, its manifestation be made more or less clear, by the human being through which it works and shines.\* Abdicating voluntarily his crown of humanity, Dr. Wilkinson reduces himself to a mere registering machine, with no overseer to keep it in order; to a mere dead channel for the waters of life, with no one to clear away impediments and impurities; a mere dead conduit for the metal fused by the fire of the

\* Of course in such passages as the above I am throughout arguing on the doctor's own premises; but not implying my acceptance of these. Divine inspiration, influx of the Spirit, and such phrases, are convenient for conveying a person's consciousness of being in ecstasy, lifted beyond his ordinary self, as they are consecrated by long usage; but I disavow any theological or mythological dogmas which others may conceive involved in them. To myself, ecstasy, trance, inspiration, vision, revelation, are no less simply human and natural, though so much less common, than sleep and waking; are just as susceptible of scientific explanation, though our science is not yet subtle and comprehensive enough to pervade them, as spring-tides or summer flowering and fruitage or the *aurora borealis*. If a man be eight feet high, or only four feet, he is of very uncommon stature, but in the one case he is not above, and in the other he is not below the limits of humanity. You must prove the insufficiency of nature for any effect, before you can fairly claim our attention to assertions of the supernatural.

spirit, with none to detect flaws or gas-bubbles and separate the slag. He does his utmost to prepare his house for munificent reception of the Spirit, and then as the Divine guest enters by one door he walks out by another. Is this a cordial welcome? Is it not unworthy both of visitor and host? Abraham in the old legend knew better how to receive heavenly guests. When the Lord and the two men or angels came to him, he did not abandon his tent and leave them to shift how they could for themselves; no, he had water fetched that they might wash their feet, and cakes of the finest flour baked, and a calf, tender and good, killed and dressed, and this he himself served to them with butter and milk and the cakes—and what was the consequence? Why, when the two men or angels had departed for Sodom, the Lord blessed Abraham with the renewal of the promise of a son in his old age and the old age of Sarah, and held much gracious conversation with him, as friend with friend, and even relented for his sake to spare Sodom could but ten righteous persons be found therein. Ah, Dr. Wilkinson, why did not you at least bring water to wash your Lord's feet?—even the feet of many of these verses, which are exposed, sorely blistered and bruised and dirty, through your studied neglect of the plainest duties of hospitality?

As if abnegation of reason, torrential speed, and total abstinence from correction were not burdens heavy enough for these poor poems to stagger under, another grievous load is inflicted, many of them being written by Swedenborgian correspondences. For myself, I frankly avow that this rigid and frigid system of minutely detailed symbolism does not

interest me in the least ; that so much as I have seen of it in what works of Swedenborg I have read, has appeared to me mainly elaborate pedagogic trifling, not at all tempting me to study of the whole. I am Emerson's impatient reader who asks :—

“What have I to do with jasper and sardonyx, beryl and chalcedony ; what with arks and passovers, ephas and ephods ; what with lepers and emerods ; what with heave-offerings and unleavened bread ; chariots of fire, dragons crowned and horned ; behemoth and unicorn ? Good for Orientals, these are nothing to me. The more learning you bring to explain them, the more glaring the impertinence. The more coherent and elaborate the system, the less I like it. I say, with the Spartan : ‘Why do you speak so much to the purpose, of that which is nothing to the purpose ?’”

Again, I thoroughly agree with the spirit of Emerson's judgment when he writes :—

“His perception of nature is not human and universal, but is mystical and Hebraic. He fastens each natural object to a theologic notion — a horse signifies carnal understanding [Wilkinson differs in rendering : “he says that the ass corresponds to scientific truth ; the horse, to intellectual truth.” — “Biography,” p. 99] ; a tree, perception ; the moon, faith ; a cat means this ; an ostrich, that ; an artichoke, this other ; and poorly tethers every symbol to a several ecclesiastical sense. The slippery Proteus is not so easily caught. In nature, each individual symbol plays innumerable parts, as each particle of matter circulates in turn through every system. The central identity enables any one symbol to express successively all the qualities and shades of real being.”

The great symbolisms and analogies, as of warmth and love, light and intelligence, and their operations and effects, are universal and obvious to all, being wide as nature, including human nature ; the petty,

stark, minutely detailed symbolisms and analogies are merely arbitrary, fanciful, ingenious, personal, and their elaboration a mere trifling and waste of precious time, like the ivory carving and puzzle-boxes of the Chinese, the tattooing of savages—they are to the genuine and general what *concetti* or conceits are to real imaginative poetry. And no one I am acquainted with would have more clearly perceived this than such a splendid master of true analogy (the magic-wand of analogy, *Der Zauberstab der Analogie*, as Novalis well terms it) as Dr. Wilkinson, had he not been from an early age over-dominated by Swedenborg, whose teachings and suggestions, which certainly enlarged his youth, have as certainly cramped his manhood.

As for the coherency and self-consistency whereon Wilkinson insists as substantiating the solidity of this vast labyrinthine structure of correspondences, I reply that any castle in the air, whether Swedenborgian, Spinozistic, or Ptolemaic, may be as coherent and consistent *in itself* as the most massy mountain-range; only the former has its baseless base in the air, and the latter is deep-rooted in the firm earth. Other systems of differing correspondences could be wrought just as consistently from the Bible (did not several of the old Fathers dabble a good deal in this sort of speculation?), and others equally from any comprehensive book; as Blake said in his vehement way: "Any man of mechanical talents may, from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's, and from those of Dante or Shakespeare an infinite number."

Sometimes I contemplate this huge ambitious edifice of the Swedenborgian doctrine of Correspondence, compiled grade above grade in series and order and degrees, and growing ever thinner as it ascends toward the culmination of a vanishing-point, as a gloomy pyramid in a vast desert, reared throughout long years by the killing toil of a multitudinous slavery; wasted learning, scourged ingenuity making bricks without straw, fettered science, maimed and mutilated genius, starved humanities—and all to what end? To be the tomb of death and oblivion, not the home of life and remembrance; to be the silent and solitary sepulchre of its royal rearer, wherein he shall lie deep hidden, thick-swathed, made mummy, prisoned in the heavy sarcophagus, which for him is also a psychophagus: a desolate pyramid slowly crumbling away in the desolate desert, the sternest mockery of a monument, an enormous heap of blocks so enormous that it will not even repay quarrying for materials for homely structures of living use; visited now and then as a mere curiosity by idle and vagrant sightseers, explored rarely by intrepid explorers, who risk their own lives in the exploration; and when at length some Belzoni-Wilkinson plucks out the very heart of its mystery, he but disinters a musty eviscerated corpse, which, if it does not wither into dust at the breath of the vital natural air, will be consigned to some museum to be stared at by the multitude with rather less of intelligent interest than is excited by its neighbour, the stuffed chimpanzee. Vanity of vanities! all is vanity! When an ephemeris shall reveal to its kind the genesis, history, nature, meaning, purpose, and future destiny of every tree, and plant, and

animal, and drop of water in the forest and river it enjoys for its day, then may some little human prophet or seer reveal to his little fellow-men all the mysteries of the universe.

But perhaps the strangest thing to note in such truly devout and wise men as Swedenborg and Wilkinson, who so bitterly denounce and ruthlessly punish lack of faith in others, however splendid their genius, however beneficent their lives, and who so ardently proclaim their own faith in ever-flowing, all-vivifying Divine Influx through every world and order of the Universe, is their utter want of faith in believing that their God's last word is locked up in a series of obscure and incongruous pamphlets, written no one knows when or by whom, coherent solely by aid of the bookbinder; containing doubtless many noble and wise things, as all antique literatures do, but containing also things (not the less sacred) most absurd, most vile, most detestable. In direct opposition to their Lord's own warning, these seraphic doctors of the New Church insist on constructing it out of the broken and rotten ruins of the Old Church, on putting new wine into the old worn leathern bottles, in making the white garments of the saints in glory out of tattered and dirty "Hebrew old clo's."

We have seen that this volume fully deserves its title of "Improvisations;" but what of the "from the Spirit," meaning "from the Lord?" Some of the pieces, as shown by the quotations in Section I., were obtained in answer to direct invocation of the Lord. But in a large number of cases, it is not *the* Spirit of the Lord who dictates; it is not even the writer himself, who may be supposed but the medium of the

Spirit ; the spirits of those whose names are the titles of the poems, speak in the first person ; and in these cases, so far as I can see, Dr. Wilkinson sinks to the level of the ordinary mediums (save that we can absolutely confide in his sincerity, however much he may be mistaken), who allege communications from the spirits of the departed. Such communications assert no claims to divine inspiration ; these human spirits, by the admission of the Spiritists themselves, are like their human counterparts, good and bad, truthful and false ; a large proportion of those who do communicate being those who are handiest as nearest to the earth-plane, are in fact much below the average, very gross, very deceitful, rather simious than human. Most of the initial and name titles quoted in my last, with some others, belong to pieces thus dictated by mere human spirits, as W. S. and M. S. (apparently uncle and aunt of the writer), Hahne-mann, Mesmer, Sir Robert Peel, England (Cromwell's spirit speaks), Berzelius, Kant, Tears of Swedenborg. I lay no particular stress on the point that all his speakers speak one speech, that is in the same style ; as Emerson says of his master : " All his interlocutors Swedenborgenise ;" for the medium might fairly answer : " Each instrument must render the music in its own way ; a violin, a violoncello, a piano, and a cornet, would not utter identical sounds in giving the same air, their key-notes and *timbres* must vary ; but if they are accurately tuned the air will be the same from all. But I do lay stress upon the fact that each of these spirits expresses such an estimate of himself as is very probably (I might even venture to say, assuredly) Wilkinson's, and very improbably

the spirit's own. Here our musical analogy must be changed. We ask Dr. Wilkinson, How is it that, many spirits as you allege breathing very different tunes through you, they all come out your own one favourite tune? And if he should reply (for your spiritist, dealing with the unsubstantial and unproducible, can never be at a loss for an explanation beyond disproof as it is beyond proof; though, fortunately for our general sanity, such as it is, the onus of proof lies on him, not the onus of disproof on us), that *the* Spirit constrained these spirits to reveal themselves in their naked verity, we should merely felicitate the doctor on the remarkable fact that the verdicts of the Spirit of the Lord always coincide with his own. However, it seems clear to me that the volume ought to have been entitled, "Improvisations from the Spirits," or "from *the* Spirit and certain human spirits," or in some such style marking variety of dictation.

And, now, what of the poems themselves, thus strangely produced? Perhaps the first thing that strikes one is what so struck Mr. Rossetti, their remarkable resemblance to Blake's; not in themes, not in doctrine, yet in essence. None indeed are quite so lovely as Blake's best lyrics; none so turbid and turbulent as his Titanic wildest in the prophetic books; none approach in depth and original daring the "Marriage of Heaven and Hell." But the more limpid are very like Blake's, in style and cadence, in artlessness and occasional laxity, in primitive simplicity, as of the historical or legendary childhood of our race, though with Wilkinson the childlike sometimes becomes childish. I find the pieces "of a



remote and charming beauty" indicated by Mr. Rossetti, and those "of a grotesque figurative relation to things of another sphere;" I scarcely find with him "much that is disjointed and hopelessly obscure;" for it appears to me that, in spite of the headlong rush of the writing, the continuity of thought is wonderfully well kept up, and that there is little or no obscurity as to the general scope and purpose, however much there may be in certain of the details, and in queer puzzling, random, stumbling phrases, due to the imperious exigences of speed, or the heavy burden of unprecious Swedenborgian Correspondences.\* There are strange alternations and

\* Let me give an instance due to the latter, which may serve to corroborate all I have urged in dispraise of its minutiae. In "England," a really vigorous summons to arouse from lethargy, dictated by Oliver Cromwell, the said dictator, among other queer words, utters this (p. 70): "This is my present *nose*." Similarly, Immanuel Kant, in the piece so entitled, declares (p. 248):—

"I shall purge off my sloth,  
And have a new *nose*."

Similarly again, in "Edgar Allan Poe," pp. 180, 182. The reader at once divines that more is meant than meets the ear. But what could have debased a writer with a real sensibility to poetic beauty, and a remarkable facility and even felicity of versification, to the absurd ugliness of these *noses*? Alas, it is an heroic but fatally insensate sacrifice at the shrine of Swedenborg, an abject submission to the cold-blooded tyranny of the master. Study that diabolical dictionary of delirium, the *Arcana Cœlestia* (it is only a dozen volumes, or 10,837 paragraphs), together with that light and entertaining work "The True Christian Religion," the "Apocalypse Explained" and the "Heaven and Hell," &c., &c., &c., and you may hope to master by some seven years' penal servitude the whole stupendous system of symbolism self-stultified. Or if you are, like myself, infinitely too frivolous even to attempt such a task, consult as I have done a "Dictionary of Correspondences, &c., from the writings of Swedenborg" (the one I have got hold of was published by Otis Clapp, School Street, Boston, in 1841), and if

confusions of grandeur and littleness. The satire and invective also are closely akin to Blake's in their uncouth strength, their furious, awkward hard-hitting; though here again the younger poet never equals some of the happy decisive strokes of the elder. Indeed, much of Wilkinson's early severe criticism on Blake, cited in the first section, is juster criticism on Wilkinson's later self and on his too-revered master, Swedenborg. In this volume are conspicuous the "utter want of elaboration, and even, in many cases, inattention to the ordinary rules of grammar." Here also the writer's "Imagination, self-divorced from a Reason which might have elevated and chastened it," has "found a home in the ruins of ancient and consummated Churches, and imbued itself with the superficial obscurity and ghastliness, far more than with the inward grandeur of primeval times." Here also the

you value your small share of reason consult not long. Behold the heart, I mean the nose, of the mystery: "NOSE (the) sig. [signifies] the life of good, on account of the respiration which has place, which, in the internal sense, is life, and likewise on account of odour, which is the grateful principle of love, whereof good is. A. C. 3103. Nose, or nostrils, sig. perception. A. C. 3577, 10,292. Those in the province of the nose are in various degrees of the perception of truth, but the more interior, the more perfect. H. H. 96. . . ."

"NOSTRILS. See "Blast of the Breath of the Nostrils." (Ps. xvii. 16) sig. the east wind, which destroys by drying up, and overthrows all by its penetration. Ap. Ex. 741."

So now the good reader is as wise as myself, and knows all about this bewildering nose. In dismissing this dreary subject, I may just remark that Swedenborg discreetly secures for himself a most convenient latitude of interpretation by attributing in a very large number of cases a good and a bad sense to the internal or spiritual meanings of the words and phrases of the Word. Thus if in certain texts the *white* signification would revolt your intellect or conscience, you have only to adopt the *black*, and *vice versa*. A truly admirable hermeneutic device!

writer "has delivered to us a multitude of new hieroglyphics, which contain no presumable reconditeness of meaning, and which we are obliged to account for, simply by the artist's having yielded himself up, more thoroughly than other men *will* do, to those fantastic impulses which are common to all mankind, and which saner men subjugate, but cannot exterminate." Here, also, "earth-born might has banished the heavenlier elements of art, and exists combined with all that is monstrous and diabolical." Here, also, "we have the impression that we are looking down into the hel's," not indeed of the ancient people, but of the cold insanity of dogmatism fused in hot frenzies of fantasy. In short, "of the worst aspect of [Wilkinson's] genius it is painful to speak."

But of the monstrous and diabolical hel's, a few words must be spoken. All students must have frequently remarked, at first with very painful astonishment, the inexorable cruelty in dogma of the most placid and gentle and sweet-hearted innocents. We find it in good Jeremy Taylor, we find it in angelic Archbishop Leighton. As for Swedenborg, as Emerson well puts it:—

"There is an air of infinite grief, and the sound of wailing all over and through this lurid universe. A vampire sits in the seat of the prophet, and turns with gloomy appetite to the images of pain. Indeed, a bird does not more readily weave its nest, or a mole bore into the ground, than this seer of souls substructs a new hell and pit, each more abominable than the last, round every new crew of offenders. . . . He saw the hell of jugglers, the hell of assassins, the hell of the lascivious; the hell of robbers who kill and boil men; the infernal tun of the deceitful; the excrementitious hel's; the hell of the revengeful, whose

faces resembled a round broad cake, and their arms rotate like a wheel. Except Rabelais and Dean Swift, nobody ever had such science of filth and corruption."

Is this summary by an outsider too hideous? Take some shreds of Wilkinson's exposition of his master's doctrine:—

"Infidelity denies God most in spirit and the spiritual world; nay, staked on death it ignores eternity in the eternal state with gnashing teeth and hideous clenches; and the proof of spirit and immortal life is farther off than ever. The *régime* of the workhouse, the hospital, and the madhouse is erected into a remorseless universe, self-fitted with steel fingers and awful chirurgery; and no hope lies either in sorrow or poverty, but only in one divine religion, which hell excludes with all its might. Human nature quails before such tremendous moralities. . . . A new phase appears in the final state; the memory of the skies is lost; baseness accepts its lot, and falsehood becomes self-evident; wasting ensues to compressed limb and faculty, and the evil spirit descends to his mineral estate, a living atom of the second death. He is still associated with his like in male and female company, and he and his, in the charry light of hell, which is the very falsity of evil, are not unhandsome to themselves. Such is the illusive varnish which in mercy [! !] drapes the bareness of the ugly skeletons of devils and Satans."—"Biography," 147; see also pp. 113 and 115, 116 for more about hell, and a defensive exposition (marvellously lame for such a swift genius as Wilkinson) of Swedenborg's doctrine of eternal punishment.

And to balance this truly diabolical hell, a mere spider-web heaven, frigid, colourless, joyless, loveless, lifeless, abstract, a paradise of geometrical diagrams and algebraic formulæ!

Blake has his fiery denunciations and condemnations, but with him these are merely explosions of temper; they are as different from the systematic, cold-blooded mercilessness of Swedenborg as the expletive "Hell and damnation!" of a burly coal-

heaven, from the same words in the mouth of a bilious Calvinistic preacher; the former means simply, I am puzzled or put out, the latter means, Our blessed Lord has pre-ordained nearly the whole of mankind to everlasting torture by the worm that dieth not, in the fire that is not quenched: the saints are so infinitely more powerful in damning than the sinners! Blake's fundamental conviction is of universal salvation, not of nearly universal damnation, as we may read in many places; nay, with some of the certainly deepest and purest of sages and mystics both of the East and the West, he will not allow the real essential existence of evil. Thus in the opening of "The Gates of Paradise":—

" Mutual forgiveness of each vice,  
Such are the Gates of Paradise,  
Against the Accuser's chief desire,  
Who walked among the stones of fire.  
Jehovah's fingers wrote The Law :  
He wept ! then rose in zeal and awe,  
And in the midst of Sinai's heat,  
Laid it beneath His Mercy Seat.  
O Christians ! Christians ! tell me why  
You rear it on your Altars high ? "

And again, in "The Everlasting Gospel," with the text of the woman taken in adultery:—

" Jesus was sitting in Moses' chair ;  
They brought the trembling woman there.  
Moses commands she be stoned to death :  
What was the sound of Jesus' breath ?  
*He laid His hand on Moses' law ;*  
*The ancient heavens, in silent awe,*  
*Writ with curses from pole to pole,*  
*All away began to roll ;*  
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And she heard the breath of God  
 As she heard by Eden's flood :  
 'Good and Evil are no more ;  
 Sinai's trumpets, cease to roar ;  
 . . . . .  
 To be good only, is to be  
 A God, or else a Pharisee,' " &c.

Well might he say to the ordinary Christian in this same poem :—

"Both read the Bible day and night,  
 But thou read'st black where I read white."

Dr. Wilkinson, more's the pity, with all his genial genius has followed his implacable master into his loathsome and horrible hells. Such pieces as "Atheism" ("Shelley's tear"), "Turner: Painter. His State," "Edgar Allan Poe," "Immanuel Kant," "Chatterton," if inspired at all were surely inspired by some obscene and insane imp of the Pit, not by "the Spirit;" the "wildness and fierce vagary" charged against Blake are here, only the vagary is cold-blooded even in its fierceness; and too appositely we may continue the quotation: "This power is possessed in different degrees by every human being, if he will but give loose and free vent to the hell that is in him; and hence, the madness even of the meanest, is terrific." How much more terrific the madness of one of the noblest, in subjection to infernal inspiration! As for Dr. Wilkinson's heaven, as revealed in these poems, it is certainly more human or less inhuman than Swedenborg's; but the humanity to my sense is rather childish. In fact, and I grieve to say so, it sometimes seems very like

the popular (and idiotic) Moody and Sankey heaven, an infinite and inexhaustible sweetstuff shop, where all the big and little Christian babies shall suck and crunch to their heart's content for ever and evermore.

#### IV

My readers will have gathered from the previous sections that the writer considers Dr. Wilkinson's faith in a peculiar Divine inspiration of his poems not only a delusion but a delusion very noxious to them and to himself. A delusion, because in essence it is that claimed in common by all the loftiest poets, and conceded by the loftiest philosophers ; a noxious delusion, because it has prevented him from using his natural faculties to correct and perfect conception and expression, and because it has impelled him to yield his natural sanity to the absolute sway of uncontrolled fantasy, following this flitting marsh-meteor as if it were the lode-star of truth. His gain from the Spirit or spirits is a heavy loss. I find nothing in this book comparable for scope and depth and solid grandeur to the great passages of the "Remarks on the Economy of the Animal Kingdom" or "The Human Body." Nor can this inferiority be fairly attributed to a want of the gift of verse, a gift which many great writers have lacked ; for, as I have said, the poems not only manifest marvellous facility but likewise uncommon felicity (despite headlong haste) in the use of metre ; and if he had taken time to correct and condense, co-operating with his inspiration, I have no doubt that his

poems would have been far more shapely and luminous and valuable. But he was simply "experimenting" on himself in "hours of recreation;" as if any truly celestial influx could pour into a man thus trifling to gratify his curiosity; so he comes to the feast of the bridegroom without the wedding garment on, the caprice of his fantasy forbidding purification and improvement of dress, and he incurs the Gospel doom. We have had wonderful improvisations, but surely never as the result of experimental pastime.

"Art has not wrote here, neither was there any time to consider how to set it punctually down, according to the right understanding of the letters, but all was ordered according to the direction of the Spirit, which often went in haste; so that in many words, letters may be wanting, and in some places a capital letter for a word; so that the penman's hand, by reason he was not accustomed to it, did often shake. And though I could have wrote in a more accurate, fair, and plain manner, yet the reason was this, that the burning fire, often forced forward with speed, and the hand and pen must hasten directly after it; for it comes and goes as a sudden shower. . . . I can write nothing of myself, but as a child which neither knows nor understands anything, which neither has ever been learnt, but only that which the Lord vouchsafes to know in me, according to the measure as Himself manifests in me."

This is part of the account which the poor ignorant shoemaker Jacob Boehme or Behmen gives us of his inspiration and improvisation: he was not making experiments in hours of recreation when "the burning fire forced forward with speed, and the hand and pen must hasten directly after it." But enough of this part of the subject. Dr. Wilkinson himself may soon have become aware of the failure of an experiment so



planned and carried out ; for though twenty-two years have elapsed since this volume was written, we believe no more such Improvisations have been published by him :—

“ Then Old Age and Experience, hand in hand,  
Lead him to Death ; and make him understand,  
After a search so painful and so long,  
That all his life he has been in the wrong.”

But in however deplorable a condition of serfdom to another and of self-illusion or self-delusion, a man of the vast acquirements, the severe scientific training, the luminous intellect, the magnificent genius, the noble moral and spiritual nature and experience of Garth Wilkinson, could not write a worthless volume ; planned he ever so subtly to stultify himself, it was certain to contain much characteristic truth and beauty. Passing over the pieces inspired, if inspired at all, by Blake's evil and malignant “ Accuser,” and stanzas wherein the stress of precipitance has driven him to catch at the most grotesque rhymes and phrases (though much less frequently than was to be expected) ; for it is not wholesome to dwell on the defects of a truly good and great man, save in so far as they may be noted for the benefit of others ; let us consider some of his most simple and spontaneous and quotable poems. I say quotable, because many worth citation are too long ; headlong haste running into diffuseness as it nearly always does, deep and concentrated writing being slow and painful. In quoting I adhere strictly to the rather peculiar punctuation of the original.

Take, first, "Sleep." "For my Wife : " p. 3 :—

"Sleep is a field, most level :  
Softness doth roam and revel  
In wind with velvet finger  
Over its grass, where linger  
Down of all birds of heaven  
Stillness of dawn and even.

And level 'tis, because  
In its most smoothest pause,  
'Tis canvass for intention  
Of heaven's most kind invention :  
For dreams more sweet than life  
Bears in day's coarser strife.

Its levelness is kept  
By all Health's gardeners : swept  
By cleanness of all kinds,  
And by Strength's ruddy hinds :  
And molehills of old care  
Have on its lawn no share.

But loving virtue's roller  
Is of that ground controller ;  
And conscience plucketh weeds  
When first they leave their seeds :  
Religion soweth grass  
Brighter than ever was.

Then when the plane's complete,  
And when the night-times meet,  
Spirits of dream-land troop,]  
Lay down the golden hoop,  
And in its limits fine  
Pour spiritual wine.

Straightway the beds of slumbers  
Heave with plant-music's numbers,

And drama of live forms  
 Bursts from the teeming swarms :  
 And sleep is revelation,  
 Life's inward preparation.

And thou mayst know thy waking,  
 By light from sleep-land breaking,  
 Thy marriage and thy house,  
 If golden are thy vows :  
 And what shall be the power  
 That rules the next day's hour."

Almost equally beautiful, though somewhat more quaint and less limpid, is "Patience," p. 8:—

"Wander, and see how far  
 Star is away from star ;  
 Mysteriously they live,  
 Far from each other thrive,  
 And when their evening comes,  
 The light of prayer outblooms.

And so thy course of being,  
 Is far from others seeing : [others']  
 All men are far from all,  
 Distance doth round them fall :  
 'Tis the star-mantle still :  
 The gulf of heavenly will.

Moreover breadth of line  
 Doth around being twine :  
 To show that out of order  
 Springeth each being's border,  
 And that the vine of God  
 Bears all things on its rod.

And then again the way  
 That doth round being play,  
 Is blended with the form  
 That wraps all nature's swarm,  
 And multifold and free,  
 Stands the immensity.

And thus from out of life,  
Rolleth the river rife,  
That hath the mission swift  
To bear all things their gift,  
And to confine to man  
The circle of his scan.

So that the web and woof  
Which is all beings' proof,  
Standeth in the intent  
That God hath with it blent,  
And the fixed palm of Him  
Keepeth His seraphim.

And from the whole of things,  
And from all eyes of wings,  
And from all thoughts of hearts,  
And from all error's smarts,  
And from all sins forgiven,  
Works forth the patient heaven.

It is the ass Christ rode  
Into the state of God :  
And 'tis the vaulted back  
That never yet was slack,  
And did sustain intense  
The work of Providence.

And under it doth lie  
The penitence on high :  
The angels walk its bridge :  
And mortals on the ridge  
That it presents to hurry  
Drop over in their flurry.

But 'tis the deepest ground  
That God hath planted round :  
And 'tis the largest thing  
That God hath made a king :  
And it holds time and space  
Rebuked by its face.

And in it all things root,  
 And heaven doth from out it shoot ;  
 For tissue 'tis of love,  
 That makes it solid prove :  
 And angels' bodies fine  
 Have patience in their wine.

What more : that patience is  
 The Lord of life and bliss :  
 It is the haste to wait  
 For bettering of state ;  
 The quickness to forgive,  
 And readiness to live.

Weave it into thy soul ;  
 Make of one web the whole :  
 Bearing thy burden's sorrow ;  
 Leaving thy soul's to-morrow.  
 Sufficient is each day  
 When patience is its ray."

I regret that there is not space here to quote "Solitude" in full, while quotation in part would miss complete development of its central thought. Perhaps some stanzas from "The Birth of Eve," p. 24, will bear citation without their context :—

"It is not meet to say  
 What love God bears to man :  
 He spread the tent of day,  
 As portal of his plan :  
 He made the heavenly arch,  
 As gable of his door,  
 He made the sky for march  
 Of humble souls and poor.

And he made love for man,  
 Helpmeet for man to have ;  
 And Paradise began  
 With love's primeval wave :

The mystery of all things  
Sailed chanting up to him :  
And inmost of all rings,  
His life alone was dim.

And on a night he dreamed  
(Archangels knew his dream),  
That God above had beamed  
Upon his hearty's stream :  
And in his blood a car  
Had sailed away from him :  
And had become a star,  
Twinkling in distance dim.

And then he clasp'd his hands,  
And sighed unto the star ;  
And from the golden sands  
Where loves primeval are,  
He sent a breath of hope  
Of such aspiring size,  
That the fair star did ope,  
E'en in those distant skies.

And from its golden rim,  
A red rain trickled down,  
That spilt dear red on him,  
And mantled all his crown :  
And he fell on his knees,  
In ecstasy of heart :  
And he prayed God would please  
To give him starry part.

So straightway down it came,  
Down, down, in dream was long ;  
And left behind it flame,  
And shed before it song :  
And as its hair came near,  
And as its voice was heard,  
The sound of nature's cheer,  
Through all her dells was stirred.

And Adam knew the sign :  
 And started from his couch :  
 And Eve was there divine,  
 Her blessing to avouch :  
 And in the bower of Eden  
 They wed the earth with sky,  
 And marriage so was laden  
 With loves' eternity.

“ And she shall have her rights,  
 Born new from age to age :  
 And she shall miss her plights,  
 And she shall fire the sage,  
 And blood and bone is man,  
 That wars for woman's side :  
 And in Redemption's Plan  
 She is Redemption's Bride.”

The “ Horse of Flesh,” p. 34, is thus introduced :—

“ This night the song that doth belong,  
 Is state of man, when he doth plan  
 To sing for pride, and high to ride.”

quote a portion of it, as his own vindication for  
 departing from the ordinary process of poetic com-  
 position :—

“ The globe of poets then,  
 The choir of angel-men,  
 Each sing a different song,  
 That doth to each belong,  
 Yet the songs one and all,  
 Are of a single call,  
 And make one body free,  
 Doth with itself agree.

Then in society,  
 Rises an anthem high,  
 'Tis as a perfume cast  
 From all flowers far and fast ;

And every fibre heaves  
 With perfume in its leaves,  
 And every part doth thrill  
 With perfume from its will.

But when men sing on earth,  
 Song hath no heavenly birth.  
 'Tis bred and born alone  
 Within the bosom's stone ;  
 Comes from the lyre of one,  
 And not from unison ;  
 And on the horse of pride,  
 With vizer down doth ride.

This is the horse of flesh ;  
 Its hoof is in a mesh  
 Of swampy wants and wishes :  
 It hath the tail of fishes : \*  
 Cold in reality ;  
 Hot in mere fantasy :  
 It dreams of heavens of singing :  
 But hell is in it springing.

Now then choose well the choir  
 That hath the numerous lyre ;  
 The song with fellows mated,  
 By others' songs completed :  
 And let the horse of flesh  
 Be lifted from the mesh ;  
 For heaven is melody,  
 And is society."

It will be observed that the didactics do not

\* "Tails sig. scientific sensual principles. . . . Ap. Ex. 559, &c.

"Fish sig. sensual affections which are the ultimate affections of the natural man. Also, those who are in common truths, which are also ultimates of the natural man. Also those who are in external falses. A.R. 405. . . . Fishes sig. scientifics. A.C. 42; 991. Fishes (Hab. i. 14-16) sig. those who are in faith separate from charity. A.R. 405. To make as the fishes of the sea, sig. to make altogether sensual. A.R. 991."—A pretty kettle of fish for the reader's digestion.



improve the poetry. Passing over some interesting but rather long pieces, we come to "E. B.," p. 75:—

"A solemn lay comes slowly,  
It peals from earth to heaven,  
Grand is the strain and holy,  
That now to thee is given.

Thou art a bride of spirit,  
A sister of our skies,  
The house thou shalt inherit  
Four square before thee lies.

Its portico is marble,  
Its stairs are ruby red,  
The birds of gladness warble  
Their gushings overhead.

Among the golden globes \*  
Of fruit that hang around ;  
The house is clad in robes  
Of beauty and of sound,

That float about festooning  
All things with beauty here ;  
The melodies are crooning  
Round land and field and mere.

And in that house a jewel  
Set fitly for thy breast :  
Ah ! spirit was not cruel  
That gave him such a rest.

\* "He hangs in shades the orange bright  
Like golden stars in a green night."—*Andrew Marvell*.

" . . . and bright golden globes  
Of fruit, suspended in their own green heaven."—*Shelley*.

Was "the Spirit" reminiscent of these "stony-bosomed" singers,  
or merely accordant with them ?

Then walk up to the casket,  
Thy life is near the door,  
'Twill open if you ask it,  
And o'er thee, spirit pour.

Thou art not far from heaven,  
Thou art not far from love ;  
Thy dower is sevenfold seven,  
Thy hopes are fixed above.

Yet earth does well to keep thee,  
For thy good deeds are needed :  
We only yet would steep thee  
In spirit-powers : unheeded.

Thy husband oft is with thee, dear,  
And he has led thee on :  
One day thou shalt see all things clear,  
For home will then be won,  
And separation's day be done."

"The Birth of Aconite," p. 77, is very powerful, both in conception and execution ; of a somewhat similar strain, though in blank verse, to Part iii. of Shelley's "Sensitive Plant." But how the doctor reconciles it with his science and theology I cannot understand. I presume he believes that God created the aconite no less than He created the olive, the palm, and the vine ; yet he writes as if it were created by the devil. This sort of loose undefined Manichæism, which Plato, by-the-bye, explicitly sets forth in the *Timæus*, is very common among Christians, in spite of the great monotheistic text (Isa. xlv. 5-7): "I am the Lord ; and there is none else, there is no god beside Me. . . . I form the light and create darkness : I make peace, and create evil : I the Lord do

all these things." They love to symbolise their Lord and the Holy Spirit by the lamb and the dove, which are among the most silly and cowardly and helpless of animals; they are dreadfully affronted if you consider the vulture, the ape, the toad equally symbolic of their God; yet nothing can be more evident than that every thing and being created (not excluding their devil) must faithfully represent or express some portion or characteristic of the Creator. If "I am the vine" is a true text, equally true must be "I am the aconite;" nay, our total-abstinence friends would maintain that the former has been and is far more extensively fatal to our race than the latter. So much for theology: as for science, it surely scorns the idea of classing things as in origin and essence good or evil, according as they seem beneficial or noxious to man. Spinoza is here incomparably more enlightened than this nineteenth-century man of science.

We now reach "W. M. W.," p. 89, a poem addressed to the writer's brother (author, I presume, of "Spirit Drawings, a Personal Narrative," 1858), followed by another to "E. W." his wife, on the death of their little son, who in a third poem, "Teddy's Flower," sends them a message of good cheer from the world of spirits, as the close informs us:—

"Teddy through Hood,  
Who has walked through Teddy's wood,  
And seen his garden wall,  
Because Hood loves the small."

I am bound to add that though the message is delivered by Hood, its style and character are of

Wilkinson. I quote the "W. M. W.," as very solemn and beautiful, especially for an improvisation :—

"Brownness of autumn is around thee, Brother,  
Darkness of life has fallen on thy path ;  
Sadness hath been unto thee as a mother,  
Sadness is not another name for wrath.

God gave, God takes away : His hand is on thee :  
Heavy its print hath been upon thy brow.  
Yet even that stroke a second heart hath won thee,  
And warmer thoughts within thy bosom glow.

Thy little Teddy, like a shaft of lightning,  
Shears through the gloom of worldliness around ;  
And from his early gloomy grave a brightening  
Shoots forth its pillar : pierces the profound.

Thy night is dying, and thy day is nearing,  
Wrap round thee then the mantle of the light.  
Leave troubling, shun dull care and duller fearing :  
Thy day is strong : arise : assert thy might.

The spirit, strong in love to thee and thine,  
Commits these verses to a brother's hand.  
They come to earth : mixed with her bitter wine,  
They glow with sparklings from the heavenly strand."

We are here in the heart's holy of holies, the inmost sanctuary of love and sorrow, "sorrow more beautiful than beauty's self;" where criticism the most just and righteous bows its head and is silent, feeling that this is also the inviolable sanctuary, the inexpugnable fortress, of all the fond frail superstitions that are born of love and grief and hope, feeling that here even spiritism is sacred, though it has been prostituted by the vilest of the vile.

Our next piece is "Saturday Night," p. 96, ending with a reminiscence of Goethe :—

"Week's curtain, folded round  
Time with a solemn sound,  
Life sleeps within thy folds,  
The past like dreams it holds.

Surely 'tis God's intent  
That life should well be blent  
With sleep, when every tread  
Has memory overhead.

So may we pass each glance,  
That the whole's countenance,  
When met on shore of heaven,  
May be good, true, and even."

I cite a little of "The Fairies' Welcome," p. 99, because of the structure of its eight-lined stanza; it was a wonderful *tour de force* to rush out sixteen such stanzas in "from thirty to forty-five minutes."

"Pour forth the bells  
In odorous notes  
Of lovely light  
Upon the sky:  
Hark! how it swells:  
Hark! how it floats,  
In colours bright  
Of minstrelsy.

My South is Truth,  
Mine East is Love,  
My West is Joy,  
My North is Light:  
And thus my youth  
Doth stand above  
Mine aged cloy  
Of former night.

All hail again  
Ye bands of life,  
Ye sons of God  
From fairy climes :  
Ye unmade men,  
Unknown to strife,  
Whose feet are shod  
With heavenly rhymes."

Here are the first and the last stanza of "The Dance of Life," p. 105 :—

"'Tis not in round of commonplace  
Life keepeth measure :  
But rhythmical her atoms trace  
The turf of pleasure.  
There is no lazy-footed tread  
In all creation ;  
But being doth with being thread  
Congratulation.

"God weaveth, in a word,  
In circles fine :  
And His bright love is stirred  
Through rounded line :  
For this is e'en completion,  
And this is new beginning :  
And swiftness urgeth mission,  
And dance is mood of winning."

Song, "Its Divine Birth," p. 135, is unfortunately too long for quotation here. Let us have a short piece in a very different mood, "Napoleon to Napoleon," p. 193 ; remembering that it was written about fourteen years before Sedan :—

"Weird sisters set thee where thou art :  
Thou shalt not stand :  
Thou seest already the fell dart—  
Thou seest the hand.

The hand is freedom's in a glove of sin,  
Peace tipped with steel :  
Thou feel'st its point moving within,  
Thy strength doth reel.

Thou art a gamester where thou sittest ;  
Thy dice, men's bones :  
Thou candleman ; ne'er yet thou littest  
The light of thrones !

I see thy funeral procession all,  
White chanting priests ;  
Thou art an ox within the priestly stall,—  
No king of beasts

Destruction fattens thee for morrow's dinner,  
Bastes thee with money ;  
The meat upon thy bones to many a sinner  
Shall yet be honey.

Great arbiter of elegancies fine,  
Lord of the fashion,  
Within thy veins runneth no better wine  
Than *Ego's* passion.

France, when full drest for her next party,  
Shall brush her boots of thee :  
And have a ruler fatter and more hearty,  
And with some human glee."

In much the same strain of uncouth, but keen and vigorous invective, Blake-like, Orsonic, are "The Pope," "Napoleon I. : What of him?" and "The Lawyers : What of them?" I select the last, p. 215, for citation ; just observing that "Men of the Time" informs us that Dr. Wilkinson's father was a special pleader, and author of several well-known law-books.

“Ranged on stools, there they sit,  
Bench of fools, full of wit :  
Bench of zanies keen as knives,  
Free of tongue, on all archives.

There they sit from age to age :  
Leathern socs of the world's stage :  
And for every hour they sit,  
They do spoil the nation's wit.

And on all sides lo ! they look  
With a vision like a cook,  
When she bastes a venison haunch,  
Fatly for a monarch's paunch.

And the beauty of their dream,  
As upon their bench they seem,  
Is old justice, fat and flavoured,  
Carved for them, and by them savoured.

Lo ! the logic skeletons  
Serve them for their meat with stones,  
And for reasonings they try  
How the logic-stones will fry.

They have ghosts of actors poor  
For their guardian angels sure,  
And their brains like dresses worn,  
Are sieves held for public corn.

Lord, how long shall these offend ?  
And what is their latter end ?—  
They shall live on bench of glee,  
Long as human cruelty.

They shall date with quarrel, years :  
Time, with hypocritic tears :  
Long as luxury hath tether,  
They shall warm their arid leather.



And as long as grasping man  
Tears down others' walls that ban  
Passage to another's goods,  
Lawyers shall dwell in their woods.

Blame them not, but blame thyself :  
They are but thy dolls of pelf :  
Thou didst put on their fine wigs :  
Thou dost feed all thine own pigs."

How pungent in their truth are some of these lines! As in the first, the fourth and fifth, and the last four stanzas. We have space for but two more very short pieces. The first is "Harebells," p. 221 :—

"Wills that lie in coverts dim,  
Shaking from their bells a hymn  
That is meant for ears of wind alone :  
For the belfry of the spirit-world,  
Is most chiefly in the flowerets curled,  
And in heavenly stillness lies its tone.

And the fairies only dream they hear,  
Voices those, with winds most thinnest ear,  
Which they put on for that express desire.  
But 'tis only in heavens very high  
That the sounds of flowers and the dews sigh,  
Are heard in waking certainty of fire."

The other is called "Two Verses for E.," p. 222 :—

"Late in the evening, gold diffused  
To all the sky is given :  
East, West, North, South, none is refused  
The last good gold of heaven.

And so when death gives gold of good,  
From his dear bed away,  
More hearts than those around that stood,  
Feel light from death's new day."

As before observed, I have cited only from the more spontaneous poems, springing directly from the native genius and mother wit, leaving aside the longer compositions whose materials were quarried by laborious studies, such as the "Hahnemann," "Fourier," "Tegnér," "Dalton," "Swedenborg," though these likewise contain many noteworthy things I have gone upon the principle well expressed by Blake (whether correct or not in his application of it) in his "Descriptive Catalogue": "The Greek Muses are daughters of Mnemosyne or Memory, and not of Inspiration or Imagination, therefore not authors of such sublime conceptions."

And now, in conclusion, I may confess that pondering once more how much that is pure and wise and beautiful is contained in this almost unknown book, notwithstanding all the wilful disadvantages under which it was written, I half repent me of the severity of certain of the strictures I have passed upon portions of it; though the sharpest of these strictures were but the very same which Wilkinson had previously passed upon a genius as great, a visionary as genuine as his own over-idolised master; upon one who had nobler fire in his spirit, a more genial heart in his breast, than the ever-placid dogmatic Swede; upon one who soared in lyric raptures of which the other was as unsusceptible as a stone; upon one who was free from that dreary, monstrous, methodic madness which kept piecing and

patching away, year after year, for a whole generation all the shreds and tatters of Hebrew old clo's, in the desperate delusion of thus making a sufficient and everlasting garment for the illimitable Universe of Life. And, moreover, can we help being angry, do we not well to be angry when, our poor race pining for illumination, some of the most fulgent spirits obstinately refuse to be effulgent; will not let their light shine forth before men, but carefully hide it under a bushel? The supreme warmth and light of genius and intellect are so rare, so sorely needed, yet so unaccountably wasted! I mean not in such instances as those of Swedenborg and Comte, where the long chronic monomania of the decadence followed an acute attack of mental disease in the prime; I think of a Maurice scourging himself with those "forty stripes save one," the Thirty-nine Articles, and burying his genius in the deathly vaults of the mouldering English Church; of a Newman dismembering himself of intellect and will, and perishing in the labyrinths of the Roman Catacombs; of a Wilkinson immolating his splendid powers on the altar built of dead men's bones, of a demented dogmatism more implacable than the old heathen altars of merely bodily human sacrifice. When I first read in the great preface to the "Human Body" (1851), that he hoped never again to come forth with the pen, a mournful verse from a place of most mournful frustrate life arose in my memory, and recurs now as I ponder these lives, so frustrate of their full development and happiness in usefulness, a verse of Matthew Arnold's stanzas from that sepulchre of Death-in-life, the Grande Chartreuse:—

“ Achilles ponders in his tent,  
The kings of modern thought are dumb ;  
Silent they are though not content ;  
They wait to see the future come :  
They have the griefs men had of yore,  
But they contend and cry no more.”

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## JOHN WILSON AND THE NOCTES AMBROSIANÆ\*

### I

THE *Noctes Ambrosianæ* appeared in *Blackwood* between 1822 and 1835, arousing an excitement and taking by storm a popularity almost unique in their kinds. Many causes beyond the intrinsic merits and vigour of the dialogues contributed to these results. When the series began, the capital of Scotland was a real literary capital, with the Great Unknown for its half-veiled monarch. Party spirit was high and fierce. The Whigs with the *Edinburgh Review*, started in the second year of the century, carried all before them in periodical literature; until, fifteen years later, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, came into the field. (The *Quarterly*, commenced in 1809, being of the modern Babylon, had but slight influence on the modern Athens.) The *Review*, which had been fractious and turbulent enough in its infancy, had now arrived at years of some discretion, and become comparatively decorous.

\* "The Comedy of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*," by Christopher North. Selected and arranged by John Skelton, advocate (author of "The Impeachment of Mary Stuart," &c.). William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh and London, 1876.

The young *Magazine* rushed into the battle ramping and raging, bellowing and roaring, full of tropical ardour and savagery, neither taking nor giving quarter ; and in the dust and confusion of the fray, and the bewilderment of manifold mystifications, unscrupulous impersonations, fantastic disguises, interchanges of armour and arms, it was impossible for the spectators clearly and surely to discern who was the captain of the host and who were the warriors. If their own defiant proclamation could be trusted,\* there were some strange wild beasts in this deluge of anthropophagi suddenly let loose upon Whigs, Radicals, Benthamites, Joe-Humists, Cockneys, Heretics, haverers, haverils, gouks, sumphs, *e tutti quanti* ; for this rampageous Apocalyptic menagerie had constituted themselves the heraldic supporters of the Nobility, the bodyguard of the Throne, the watch-dogs of the quiet sanctities of the Altar—around which they yelped and barked day and night. In the “Ancient Chaldee Manuscript” are specified some of the principal champions of “the man in plain apparel, which had his camp in the place of Princes, whose name was as it had been the colour of ebony, and whose number was the number of a maiden, when the days of the years of her virginity have expired” (Blackwood, 17 Princes Street). “And the first which came was after the likeness of a beautiful leopard, from the valley of the palm-trees, whose going forth was comely

\* “Translation from an ancient Chaldee Manuscript,” *Blackwood*, October 1817 ; quickly suppressed, so that few sets contain it ; but republished as appendix to the “Noctes,” in vol. iv. of the twelve-volume edition of the Works of Professor Wilson, edited by his son-in-law, the late Professor J. F. Ferrier. (*Blackwood*, 1855.)

as the greyhound, and his eyes like the lightning of fiery flame (Wilson, author of the 'Isle of Palms') . . . There came also from a far country the scorpion, which delighteth to sting the faces of men (Lockhart). . . . Also the great wild boar from the forest of Lebanon, and he roused up his spirit, and I saw him whetting his dreadful tusks for the battle (Hogg, from Ettrick Forest). Also the black eagle of the desert, whose cry is as the sound of an unknown tongue, which flieth over the ruins of the ancient cities, and hath his dwelling among the tombs of the wise men (Sir William Hamilton)." The formidable catalogue included also the lynx, the griffin, the stork, the hyæna, "and the beagle and the slowhound after their kind, and all the beasts of the field, more than could be numbered, they were so many."

Charged with such powerful explosives as political passion and reckless personalities, a paper or series of papers will indeed go up like a rocket, but is apt to come down like the stick. If, then, when the gunpowder has been long burnt out, and the firework blaze long since swallowed up in oblivious darkness, the "Noctes" still float in the upper air, and still shine with a certain pale or ruddy light, it must be because of some inherent buoyancy and brilliance. It is true that of the original series of seventy-one, Professor J. F. Ferrier, in his twelve-volumed edition of the works of his father-in-law, left about thirty to haunt as wan ghosts the sepulchral limbo of old sets of *Blackwood*; some because they were mainly occupied with matters of merely local and temporary interest, others because Wilson had but small part in them; but the remainder (forty-one by Preface,

thirty-nine by Contents), dating from 1825 to 1835, being wholly Wilson's, various songs excepted, he set forth as a permanent galaxy in the starry heavens of our literature ; and who will may study or restudy the same as a systematic whole in the first four volumes of the said works. Ferrier was a subtle thinker, an accomplished scholar, an acute and independent critic ; but the father of his wife had thrown a glamour over him, as over so many others, and to his eyes every star in that constellation was of the first magnitude. But we, who never came within the scope of Christopher North's personal influence, and whose youth was scarce touched by his written spells, cannot but discern that the cluster is far less splendid than reported, and far from well-defined—that no one of its stars is of the first or even of the second degree ; that their light is provokingly intermittent, and, at the brightest, rather wavering and diffuse than intense. For his personality, beyond doubt, was exceedingly more potent than his literary genius ; and, while fully admitting and admiring the natural fascination which the former exercised on those with whom he came in contact, we must reserve and exercise our right to distinguish and separate this from the legitimate influence of the latter.

In order to clearly explain this, it may be necessary to write somewhat about the man, gathering the facts from the "Memoir" by his daughter, Mrs. Mary Gordon (two vols., Edinburgh : Edmonston and Douglas, 1862). John Wilson was born at Paisley on the 18th May 1785, his father being a wealthy gauze manufacturer ; his mother, lineally descended by the female side from the great Marquis of Montrose, a stately lady, of



rare intellect, wit, humour, wisdom, and grace, whose remarkable beauty was transmitted to her children. The father died in 1797, and John entered Glasgow University, where he remained until 1803. In the June of this year he entered Magdalen College, Oxford, as a gentleman-commoner, leaving in 1807, after a very brilliant career as a scholar, and one not less brilliant as an athlete, being a splendid all-round man—rider, swimmer, walker, runner, dancer, jumper, angler, boater, wrestler, boxer. In his essay on Gymnastics ("Works," vol. v.), he gives one instance of his own prowess: "With a run and a leap on a slightly inclined plane, perhaps an inch to a yard, we have seen twenty-three feet done in great style—and measured to a nicety; but the man who did it (aged twenty-one, height five feet eleven inches, weight eleven stone) was admitted to be (Ireland excepted) the best far leaper of his day in England." As to his boxing, we are told by De Quincey, his junior by a year and contemporary at Oxford, though the two did not get personally acquainted there: "There was no man who had any talents, real or fancied, for thumping or being thumped, but he had experienced some *preening* of his merits from Mr. Wilson. All other pretensions in the gymnastic arts he took a pride in humbling or in honouring; but chiefly his examinations fell upon pugilism; and not a man who could either 'give or take,' but boasted to have punished, or to have been punished by, *Wilson of Mallen's*." On one occasion a surly rough obstructed his way across a bridge. Wilson lost patience and offered to fight him. The fellow said: "You had better not fight with me; I am such-a-one" (a well-

known pugilist). This announcement rather stimulated than daunted young Oxford: "In one minute off went his coat, and he set to upon his antagonist in splendid style. [Mrs. Gordon has evidently a keen spark of her father's fire.] The astonished and *punished* rival, on recovering from the blows and surprise, accosted him thus: 'You can only be one of the two; you are either Jack Wilson or the devil.' This encounter no doubt led, for a short time, to fraternity and equality over a pot of porter." His athletic tastes, love of adventure, and high animal spirits led him into all sorts of queer society, such as affords the only opportunity for the study of unsophisticated human nature. A fellow-collegian records of him: "One of his great amusements used to be to go to the 'Angel Inn,' about midnight, when many of the up and down London coaches met; there he used to preside at the passengers' supper-table, carving for them, inquiring all about their respective journeys, why and wherefore they were made, who they were, &c.; and, in return, astonishing them with his wit and pleasantry, and sending them off wondering *who and what HE could be!* He frequently went from the 'Angel' to the 'Fox and Goose,' an early 'purl and gill' house, where he found the coachmen and guards, &c., preparing for the coaches which had left London late at night; and there he found an audience, and sometimes remained till the college gates were opened, rather (I believe) than rouse the old porter, Peter, from his bed to open for him expressly. It must not be supposed that in these strange meetings he indulged in *intemperance*—no such thing; he went to such places, I am convinced, to study character, in

which they abounded. I never saw him show the slightest appearance even of drink, notwithstanding our wine-drinking, suppers, punch, and smoking in the common-room to very late hours. I never shall forget his figure, sitting with a long earthen pipe, a great *tie* wig on; those wigs had descended, I fancy, from the days of Addison (who had been a member of our College), and were worn by us all (in order, I presume, to preserve our hair and dress from tobacco-smoke) when smoking commenced after supper, and a strange appearance we made in them!"

The same gentleman says: "His pedestrian feats were marvellous. On one occasion, having been absent a day or two, we asked him, on his return to the common-room, where he had been. He said, in London. 'When did you return?'—'This morning.'—'How did you come?'—'On foot.' As we all expressed surprise, he said: 'Why, the fact is I dined yesterday with a friend in Grosvenor (I think it was) Square, and as I quitted the house a fellow who was passing was impertinent and insulted me, upon which I knocked him down; and as I did not choose to have myself called in question for a street row, I at once started as I was, in my dinner dress, and never stopped until I got to the College gate this morning, as it was being opened.' Now this was a walk of fifty-eight miles at least, which he must have got over in eight or nine hours at most, supposing him to have left the dinner-party at nine in the evening." Here is another instance ("Memoir," i. 191, 192), when on a pedestrian tour in the Western Highlands with his wife in 1815: "In Glenorchy his time was much occupied by fishing, and distance was not considered

an obstacle. He started one morning at an early hour to fish in a loch which at that time abounded in trout, in the Braes of Glenorchy, called Loch Toilà. Its nearest point was thirteen miles distant from his lodgings at the schoolhouse. On reaching it, and unscrewing the butt-end of his fishing-rod to get the top, he found he had it not. Nothing daunted, he walked back, breakfasted, got his fishing-rod made all complete, and off again to Loch Toilà. He could not resist fishing on the river when a pool looked invitingly, but he went always onwards, reached the loch a second time, fished round it, and found that the long summer day had come to an end. He set off for his home again with his fishing-basket full and confessing somewhat to weariness. Passing near a farmhouse whose inmates he knew (for he had formed acquaintance with all), he went to get some food. They were in bed, for it was eleven o'clock at night, and after rousing them, the hostess hastened to supply him ; but he requested her to get him some whisky and milk. She came with a bottle-full and a can of milk, with a tumbler. Instead of a tumbler he requested a bowl, and poured the half of the whisky in along with half the milk. He drank the mixture at a draught ; and, while his kind hostess was looking on with amazement, he poured the remainder of the whisky and milk into the bowl and drank that also. He then proceeded homeward, performing a journey of not less than seventy miles." In "Anglimania : Cast Second ; Twaddle on Tweed-side" ("Works," vi. 334, 335), he tells this story himself, with some slight variations. He says nothing of the Homeric can of milk and bottle of whisky,

but avows that on recovering from the stupor at the absence of his rod-pieces, "we put our pocket-pistol to our head and blew out its brains into our mouth—in the liquid character of Glenlivet." He makes the distance to the loch fourteen instead of thirteen miles, and thus summarises the day's proceedings: "At eleven our five flies were on the water. By sunset we had killed twenty dozen—none above a pound, and by far the greater number about a quarter—but the *tout-ensemble* was imposing, and the weight could not have been short of five stone. We filled both creels (one used for salmon), bag, and pillow-slip, and all the pockets about our person—and at first peep of evening star went our ways again down the glen towards Dalmally. We reached the school-house 'ae wee short hour ayont the twal,' having been on our legs almost all the twenty-four hours, and for eight up to the waist in water—distance walked, fifty-six miles; trouts killed, twenty dozen and odds; and weight carried—

'At the close of the day when the hamlet was still,  
And mortals the sweets of forgetfulness proved,'

certainly seventy pounds for fourteen miles; and if the tale be not true, may May-day miss Maga."

So fatal are "long earthen pipes" and Glenlivet to physical stamina and moral fortitude!

## II

In our desire to illustrate the character of Wilson in youth—a character preserved throughout his prime, for his nature was not one of those which have startling late developments or aberrations—we have reserved but scant space for recording the rest of his career. Luckily, the “Memoir” by his daughter is a very accessible as well as very readable book, and to it we refer the reader who wants full details. On leaving Oxford, in 1807, he went to live at Elleray, near Windermere, a charming estate with a charming rustic cottage, which he had purchased some little time before. Here were his headquarters until 1815. He soon became friendly with Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Charles Lloyd, Bishop Watson, and other notables of the district, and especially with his age-fellow, Thomas De Quincey, about fourteen years afterwards to be famous as the English opium eater. Of Windermere he constituted himself the admiral (Canning made him Lord High Admiral of the Lakes), maintaining a little fleet of seven sailing vessels as well as a fine ten-oared Oxford gig. His time was fully employed, all the days and many of the nights, with rambling, boating, wrestling, riding, bull-hunting (see De Quincey’s account of this, “Memoir,” i. 138–140), and cock-fighting. In the “Memoir” (i. 145–147) is a good story of one of his boating and swimming freaks, extracted from “Rambles in the Lake Country,” by Edwin Waugh. For softer delights he had poetry, dancing, and love-making. The Misses Penny, daughters of a Liverpool mer-

chant, lived at Ambleside; and Miss Jane and he, being both young and lish, were not long in dancing into each other's hearts. "A spectator at a ball given in Liverpool in those days, relates that when Mr. Wilson entered the room with Miss Penny on his arm, the dancers stopped and cheered in mere admiration of their appearance." They were married in May 1811, she bringing some fortune, and he having not cut very deeply into the unencumbered £50,000 left him by his father. "The circumstances which occurred to make it absolutely necessary to leave Elleray were of a most painful nature, inasmuch as they not only deprived Wilson of his entire fortune, but in that blow revealed the dishonesty of one closely allied to him in relationship, and in whom years of unshaken trust had been reposed. An uncle had acted the part of 'unjust steward,' and, by his treachery, overwhelmed his nephew in irretrievable loss. A sudden fall from affluence to poverty is not a trial easily borne, especially when it comes through the fault of others; but Wilson's nature was too strong and noble to bow beneath the blow. On the contrary, with a virtue rarely exemplified, he silently submitted to the calamity, and generously assisted in contributing to the support of his relative, who, in the ruin of others, had also ruined himself. Here was a practical illustration of Moral Philosophy, more eloquent, I think, than even the Professor's own lectures, when he came to teach what he had practised."

So, in 1815, he removed to Edinburgh with his young wife and babes, and was received into the house, 53 Queen Street, of his mother, "a lady

whose skill in domestic management was the admiration and wonder of all zealous housekeepers. Under one roof she accommodated three distinct families; and, besides the generosity exercised towards her own, she was hospitable to all, while her charities and goodness to the poor were unceasing. . . . She belonged to that old school of Scottish ladies whose refinement and intellect never interfered with duties the most humble." If that fine old school is really now closed, the sooner it opens again the better. This same year he was called to the bar, along with his friend Patrick (afterwards Lord) Robertson, of legal, and yet more convivial and humorous renown; *Scorpio* Lockhart joining them the next year. Wilson professionally promenaded the *Hall of Lost Steps* (*Salle de Pas Perdue*, as our neighbours say) for but a brief while, not wholly briefless; he got a few cases, but owned afterwards that when he found them on his table, "I did not know what the devil to do with them!" Of such stuff are not lawyers made. In the "Memoir" (i. 228) is a capital sketch of Wilson and Robertson in a punt: the former in the stern, standing and pointing with bare extended arm; the latter, almost supine with the oars, a long pull if not a strong pull, puffing big clouds from his cigar.

We now come to the starting, in 1817, of *Blackwood*, of which Wilson (Lockhart, in 1825, going to London to assume the editorship of the *Quarterly*) ere long made himself the leading spirit, though the man whose "name was as it had been the colour of ebony" always held firmly the real editorship in his own hands. An interesting chapter of the "Memoir" (i. 233-295) is devoted to this subject. Towards the



end of 1819, Wilson, having then five young children, removed with his family from his mother's house to 20 Ann Street, then quite out of town in the suburb of Stockbridge. In April 1820, the chair of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh became vacant by the death of Dr. Thomas Brown. The two chief competitors for the post were Wilson and Sir William Hamilton, afterwards Professor of Logic and Metaphysics. The contest was exceedingly furious, being fought out by their partisans on purely political grounds; Government influence and Tories for Wilson, Whigs (the Whigs, now effete, were very much alive then) for Hamilton; but the intimate personal friendship of the two rivals was not broken or interrupted. "The patronage lay with the Town Council, whose members had to be canvassed personally, like the voters in a rotten borough." Wilson was elected by twenty-one votes out of thirty, and immediately was hard at work reading-up and preparing his first course of lectures, and asking counsel from competent friends. In his first lecture he triumphed over all ill-will; and thenceforward to his death rejoiced in the title of "The Professor," actually filling the chair for thirty years, and only resigning when quite worn out and broken down. And as he grew more and more prominently the Professor, one of the best-known men in Edinburgh, he grew also more and more prominently Christopher North, one of the best known writers in Britain. At the University he was the idol of his class, wielding an enormous influence over many successive student-generations, all in their plastic youth. John Hill Burton, the historian of Scotland and delightful Book

Hunter, who sat under him in 1830, says : " Much as I had heard of his appearance, it exceeded expectation ; and I said to myself that, in the tokens of physical health and strength, intellect, high spirit, and all the elements of masculine beauty, I had not seen his equal." The Rev. William Smith, of North Leith Church, writes of a lecture in the winter session of 1837 : " I have heard some of the greatest orators of the day—Lords Derby, Brougham, Lyndhurst ; Peel, O'Connell, Sheil, Follett, Chalmers, Caird, Guthrie, M'Neile ; I have heard some of these in their very best styles make some of their most celebrated appearances ; but for popular eloquence, for resistless force, for the seeming inspiration that swayed the soul, and the glowing sympathy that entranced the hearts of his entire audience, that lecture by Professor Wilson far exceeded the loftiest efforts of the best of these I ever listened to." And again : " It was something, moreover, not without value or good effect, to be enabled to contemplate, from day to day throughout a session, the mere outward aspect of one so evidently every inch a man, nay, a king of men, in whom manly vigour and beauty of person were in such close keeping with all the great qualities of his soul ; the sight at once carried back the youthful student's imagination to the age of ancient heroes and demigods, when higher spirits walked with men on earth, and made an impression on the opening mind of the most genial and ennobling tendency." In an account of Wilson's last year of professional work (session 1850-51), Mr. Alexander Taylor Innes, the gold medallist of that year, writes : " The first thing that every one remarked on entering his class, was

how thoroughly he did his proper work as a Professor of Moral Philosophy. This is not generally known now, and was not even at the time. There was a notion that he was there Christopher North, and nothing else; that you could get scraps of poetry, bits of sentiment, flights of fancy, flashes of genius, and anything but Moral Philosophy. Nothing was further from the truth in that year, 1850. In the very first lecture he cut into the core of the subject, raised the question that has always in this country been held to be the deepest and hardest in the science (the origin of the Moral Faculty), and *hammered* at it through the great part of the session. Even those who were fresh from Sir William Hamilton's class, and had a morbid appetite for swallowing hard and angular masses of logic, found that the work here was quite stiff enough for any of us. . . . His appearance in his classroom it is far easier to remember than to forget. He strode into it with the professor's gown hanging loosely on his arms, took a comprehensive look over the mob of young faces, laid down his watch so as to be out of the reach of his sledgehammer fist, glanced at the notes of his lecture (generally written on the most wonderful scraps of paper), and then, to the bewilderment of those who had never heard him before, looked long and earnestly out of the north window, towards the spire of the old Tron Kirk; until, having at last got his idea, he faced round and uttered it with eye and hand, and voice, and soul, and spirit, and bore the class along with him." And, finally, Mr. John Skelton bears witness, in his Introduction to the volume which has occasioned the present article:

“John Wilson had the eagle-beak, the lion-like mane of the Napiers. Mrs. Barrett Browning has said of Homer :—

‘Homer, with the broad suspense  
Of thund’rous brows, and lips intense  
Of garrulous god-innocence’—

and whenever I read the lines, the mighty presence of Christopher North rises before me. . . . He was such a magnificent man! No other literary man of our time has had such muscles and sinews, such an ample chest, such perfect lungs, such a stalwart frame, such an expansive and Jove-like brow. Had he lived in the classic ages, they would have made a god of him—not because he wrote good verses, or possessed the Divine gift of eloquence, but because his presence was god-like. There was a ruddy glow of health about him, too, such as the people of no nation have possessed as a nation since the culture of the body as an art of the national life has been neglected. The critic, therefore, who never saw Wilson, cannot rightly estimate the sources of his influence. . . . The picture of the old man eloquent in his college classroom—the old man who had breasted the flooded Awe, and cast his fly across the bleakest tarns of Lochaber—pacing restlessly to and fro like a lion in his confined cage; his grand face working with emotion while he turns to the window, through which are obscurely visible the spires and gables of the ancient city; his dilated nostril yet ‘full of youth;’ his small grey eye [Mr. Innes terms it “bright blue;” and probably both are correct] alight with visionary fire, as he discourses (somewhat discursively, it must

be owned) of truth and beauty and goodness, is not one to be forgotten. *Had he talked the merest twaddle, the effect would have been very nearly the same*; he was a living poem where the austere grandeur of the old drama was united with the humour and tenderness of modern story-tellers; and some such feeling it was that attracted and fascinated his hearers."

So much for Wilson as the Professor: what he did as Christopher North may be judged by a list, appended to the "Memoir," of his contributions to *Blackwood*, from 1826, it being impossible now to fix the authorship of various articles before that date. In one month we find five articles, making sixty-eight pages, from his pen; in another, double number, five articles, sixty-five pages; in another, six, sixty-nine; in another, double number, seven, one hundred and sixteen; in another, double, four, one hundred and forty-seven; in another, double, seven, one hundred and thirty-one. In one year, 1830, he wrote thirty articles, making twelve hundred columns; in the two years, 1833-34, fifty-four, making two thousand four hundred columns. All this in addition to his university work. "The amazing rapidity with which he wrote caused him too often to delay his work to the very last moment, so that he almost always wrote under compulsion, and every second of time was of consequence. Under such a mode of labour there was no hour left for relaxation. When regularly in for an article for *Blackwood*, his whole strength was put forth, and it may be said that he struck into life what he had to do at a blow. He at these times began to write immediately after breakfast. . . . He then shut himself into his study,

with an express command that no one was to disturb him, and he never stirred from his writing-table until perhaps the greater part of a 'Noctes' was written." After a frugal dinner at nine (boiled fowl, potatoes, and glass of water), he wrote on again till midnight; and so for the next day or two when necessary. "I do not exaggerate his power of speed, when I say he wrote more in a few hours than most able writers do in a few days; examples of it I have often seen in the very manuscript before him, which, disposed on the table, was soon transferred to the more roomy space on the floor at his feet, where it lay 'thick as autumnal leaves in Vallombrosa,' only to be piled up again quickly as before."

In 1837, after twenty-six years of most happy marriage, he lost his wife. Their five children were all grown up. The three daughters afterwards married: Margaret, the eldest, her cousin, Professor J. F. Ferrier; Mary, Mr. J. T. Gordon, sheriff of Midlothian; Jane Emily, Professor Aytoun—of whose bashful wooing, and Wilson's presentation of the ladylove "with the author's compliments" (pinned to her back), her sister in the "Memoir" tells us not. In 1840 he was attacked by paralysis of the right hand, which disabled him for nearly a year. He took a zealous part in the Burns festival at Ayr, 6th August, 1844; having written the essay for the "Land of Burns," brought out by Messrs. Blackie, of Glasgow. When the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution was established, 1847, he was elected the first president; and was annually re-elected during his life. In the winter of 1850, in his sixty-sixth year, his health was evidently breaking, and he could scarcely manage to

get through the session. Mr. Taylor Innes says: "The old lion sat in his arm-chair, yellow-maned and toothless, prelecting with the old volubility and eloquence, and with occasionally the former flash of his bright blue eye, soon fading into dulness again. I still remember his tremulous 'God bless you!' as the door closed for the last time. How different from that fresh and vigorous old age in which he had moved among us so royally the year before!" In 1851 he was forced to resign his professorship, after thirty years' service; and Lord John Russell, the old Whig, hastened to secure a pension of £300 a year for the stout old Tory. In the summer of 1852, although very infirm, he had himself driven to Edinburgh from Woodburn, near Dalkeith, where he was staying with his brother Robert: "His mysterious mission to Edinburgh was to give his vote for Thomas Babington Macaulay. When he entered the committee-room in St. Vincent Street, supported by his servant, a loud and long cheer was given." Macaulay heartily responded to this magnanimity. As Wilson wrote on another occasion: "The animosities are mortal, but the humanities live for ever." In his later years, he and Patrick Robertson had many a pleasant evening with Jeffrey, Cockburn, and Rutherford. On the 1st of April, 1854, he was stricken with paralysis of one side; and as the clock sounded midnight on the 3rd he breathed his last. He was buried in the Dean Cemetery, "where now repose a goodly company of men whose names will not soon die—Jeffrey, Cockburn, Rutherford, Thomas Thomson, Edward Forbes, David Scott, John Wilson, and his well-loved brother James." It was soon resolved

in public meeting to raise a memorial to him ; and John Steell was commissioned to execute a bronze statue, ten feet in height, with a suitable pedestal, to be placed at the north-west corner of East Princes Street Gardens.

In the year following his death, that other monument to his memory, the edition of his works, was begun by Professor Ferrier. Comprehensive as it is, including "Noctes," essays, critiques, tales, poems, some important series of articles are omitted, as those on Spenser and "Specimens of the British Critics." Of the latter Mrs. Gordon says : "Those papers, along with too many of equal power and greater interest, have found jealous protection within the *cinture* of *Blackwood's* pages, and seem destined to a fate which ought only to belong to the meagre works of mediocrity." It is natural that a loving and revering daughter should wish as much as possible of her father's writing collected in a permanent form ; but we may safely assume that Messrs. Blackwood were and are very willing to republish anything in demand, and we are sure that Ferrier was not the man to leave out anything of enduring interest. So we take it that our busy world in general is quite satisfied, if not over satisfied, with the dozen rather closely printed volumes ; and we venture to remind Mrs. Gordon that permanent form by no means secures permanent perusal. Ferrier, indeed, as we have already remarked, was fascinated and overpowered by the personal magnetism of his father-in-law into a stupor of admiration, which, with all our hearty respect for both, we cannot help feeling is very comical. Thus, writing of the principal personages of the "Noctes," he calmly



assures us: "In wisdom the Shepherd equals the Socrates of Plato; in humour he surpasses the Falstaff of Shakespeare. Clear and prompt, he might have stood up against Dr. Johnson in close and peremptory argument; fertile and copious, he might have rivalled Burke in amplitude of declamation." Mr. Skelton, although, as we have seen, he, too, has been mightily influenced by the same personal ascendancy, writes far more judicially of the writer: "John Wilson was an immense man, physically and mentally, and yet his nature was essentially incomplete. He needed concentration. Had the tree been thoroughly pruned, the fruit would have been larger and richer. As it was, he seldom contrived to sustain the inspiration unimpaired for any time; it ran away into shallows, and spread fruitlessly over the land. In many respects one of the truest, soundest, honestest men who ever lived, he used to grow merely declamatory at times. Amazingly humorous as the Shepherd of the 'Noctes' is (there are scenes, such as the opening of the haggis, the swimming match with Tickler while the London packet comes up the Forth, which manifest the humour of conception as well as the humour of character in a measure that has seldom been surpassed by the greatest masters), his fun is often awkward, and his enthusiasm is apt to tire. . . . And if the Shepherd at his best could be taken out of the 'Noctes' and compressed into a compact duodecimo volume, we should have an original piece of imaginative humour, which might fitly stand for all time by the side of the portly Knight [Falstaff.]" In his "Comedy of the Noctes," Mr. Skelton has attempted the compression thus indicated,

and we think that he has very fairly succeeded in his attempt; for we certainly find in this case that the third is better than the whole—that now, by the lapse of time, his one volume is more interesting and effective than Ferrier's four. He "suspects that the *lacunæ* are sometimes visible to the naked eye," and they certainly are, and here and there a few words in parenthesis might well have been inserted to bridge the gaps; but it is also true that in the complete dialogues the transitions were often very abrupt. Ferrier's glossary has been retained; and Ferrier's own words thereanent are too good for omission here (Preface to "Noctes," xix.): "As the last specimen, then, on a large scale, of the national language of Scotland which the world is ever likely to see, I have preserved with scrupulous care the original orthography of these compositions. Glossarial interpretations, however, have been generally subjoined, for the sake of those readers *who labour under the disadvantage of having been born on the south side of the Tweed.*" The glossary is very good as far as it goes, but, like most glossaries we have ever come across, omits some words which the average general reader cannot understand; while including others with whose meaning he is quite familiar. Thus we find *braird*, *yellow-yite*, *flasterin*, *clegs*, *soop* the floor or *ripe* the *ribs*, of each a *Thurm*, *bate* the *girdle*, *partail*, *stance*, *rumblede-thumps* in the text, unexplained by footnote or glossary; yet surely most of those who labour under the disadvantage of having been born on the south side of the Tweed, would be far more puzzled by them than by such glossary terms as *a'*, *aboon*, *ae*, *airn*, *alane*, *aneath*, *auld*; would indeed be as "catawamp-

tuously chewed up" by them as was the Opium Eater, who had been claiming mastery of the Scottish dialects, by the Shepherd's, "What's a *gowpen of glaur?*" and the lucid interpretation, "It's just *twa neif-fu's o' clarts*" [two fistfuls of mud]. It would have been well, also, had Mr. Skelton, like Ferrier, noted the dates at which the several dialogues appeared; and we think he had better have given, as did Ferrier, some of the best of the songs, with the airs, even although not by Wilson, merely naming the author. For the rest, we have nothing but praise for the manner in which he has accomplished the task he set himself.

In several recent literary biographies we have remarked that a letter from Carlyle, or anything concerning him personally, is about the most interesting piece in the work. In the "Memoir of Wilson," II. 140-151, Carlyle appears but once, in a letter, not important but characteristic, from Craigenputtock, December, 1829, reminding the Professor of his promise of a Christmas visit: "Come, then, if you would do us a high *favour*, that warm hearts may welcome in the cold New Year, and the voice of poetry and philosophy, *numeris lege solutis*, may for once be heard in these deserts, where, since Noah's deluge, little but the whirring of heath-cocks and the lowing of oxen has broken the stillness. You shall have a warm fire, and a warm welcome; and we will talk in all dialects, concerning all things, climb to hill-tops, and see certain of the kingdoms of this world; and at night gather round a clear hearth, and forget that winter and the devil are so busy in our planet. There are seasons when one seems as if emancipated from

the 'prison called life,' as if its bolts were broken, and the Russian ice-palace were changed into an open sunny *Tempe*, and man might love his brother without fraud or fear ! A few such hours are scattered over our existence, otherwise it were too hard, and would make us too hard." Further on he says : " My wife sends you her kindest regards, and still hopes against hope that she shall wear her Goethe brooch this Christmas, a thing only done when there is a man of genius in the company." So much for the lonely scholar nourishing his mighty heart in solitude, and already brooding over "Sartor Resartus" and the "History of the French Revolution." The letter ends with a few words touching Wilson : " I must break off, for there is an Oxonian gigman coming to visit me in an hour, and I have many things to do. I heard him say the other night that in literary Scotland there was not one such other man as ——!—a thing in which, if —— would do himself any justice, I cordially agree." We cannot but think that Carlyle was then mistaken in his estimate of Wilson, who in our opinion did himself full justice—that is, all the justice of which his nature was capable. There are men forced by circumstances to hurry their work, or to labour on uncongenial subjects, who could undoubtedly write much better if they had ample time and subjects of their own choice. But the case of Wilson was not as theirs. He always wrote on whatever subjects he preferred, and he had plenty of leisure for writing, rewriting, correcting, condensing ; but he was lacking in the artistic impulse and instinct to elaborate and study and perfect. His poems and tales, to which he gave more care, are

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not stronger but weaker than his headlong "Noctes." His nature and genius were not profound and intense, but exuberant and expansive. His pathos and humour alike, though natural and genuine, are not deep ; are easily stirred and much too frothy. A hearty laugh is echoed and re-echoed again and again, till it becomes a wearisome, hollow monotony ; page after page is pickled in the diluted brine of a single not very salt tear. The humour, in especial, is composed of the simplest and commonest ingredients — boisterous animal spirits and boundless exaggeration. Turn over the leaves of his works, and you see at a glance, by the mere multitude of the *dashes*, that you have to do with a prolix and slap-dash rhapsodist, not with a writer working studiously under laws of austere self-restraint. In his precipitant outpourings, the dregs, the foam, and the good liquor gush together in turbid redundance. Yet when criticism and hyper-criticism have said their worst, we feel that this condensed "Comedy of the Noctes" is and will long continue a right wholesome as well as enjoyable book, particularly for the young. Robust animal spirits are catching and inspiring in this weary, moiling world, and we willingly ignore the defaults of their joyous and joy-giving possessors. The book is manly throughout ; full of sympathy with Nature and human nature ; contemptuous of all cant and priggishness, reverent to enthusiasm in the presence of lofty genius and virtue ; inciting to activity, boldness and endurance, to the freest bodily as well as mental and moral culture. The Gargantuan eating and drinking (not all unaccompanied by smoking) are most jolly, for there is a hearty natural poetry in much of the

fervid festal expatiation ; and omnivorous eucrazy is infinitely to be preferred to the sentimental languishment of dyspeptic queasiness. Finally, the rich and racy Doric of the Shepherd adds wonderfully to the effectiveness of the whole ; and really, as Ferrier urged, gives it a monumental significance. Nor do we think the less of Wilson because his life was superior to his writings, we who have been pained and disappointed in learning how many very considerable authors were very inconsiderable men.

## JAMES HOGG, THE ETTRICK SHEPHERD \*

### I

OUR brief notice of Wilson and the "Noctes" may be fitly followed by some account of the original of the leading character in those exuberant dialogues. Christopher North himself intended and engaged to write a Memoir of his dear Shepherd, who owed much to him and to whom he also owed much; and this Memoir was even announced as accompanying a certain edition of Hogg's Poems, but it never got written. The Rev. Thomas Thomson tells us that his "Life of the Ettrick Shepherd" has been composed "partly from communications with his family, partly from oral intimations of the few friends who still survive, and partly from his own reminiscences which he appended to several of his publications, and

\* "The Works of the Ettrick Shepherd. A new Edition; with a Memoir of the Author, by the Rev. Thomas Thomson [and Hogg's Autobiography and Reminiscences and Illustrative Engravings]." Two vols. Blackie and Son; London, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. 1865-66

"The Jacobite Relics of Scotland; being the Songs, Airs, and Legends of the Adherents to the House of Stuart." Collected and illustrated by James Hogg. Reprinted from the Original Edition. First and Second Series. Two vols. Paisley: Alex. Gardner.

which are now given in their collected form at the end of this volume, as his Autobiography." They had better have come immediately after or before the Life, and the last *partly* should be *mainly*, Mr. Thomson having little to add save by way of disquisition and amplification. Fortunately the real Shepherd is pretty fully pictured to us in his own reminiscences and other writings, whose self-portraiture agrees very well with the various casual sketches by his contemporaries, for he was genuine and simple to the core, and delightfully outspoken; and by help of these we can discern that there is a good deal of the actual man in the stage-presentation of the "Noctes." Thus he prefaces his fragmentary Autobiography:—"I like to write about myself; in fact there are few things which I like better; it is so delightful to call up old reminiscences. Often have I been laughed at, for what an Edinburgh editor styles my good-natured egotism, which is sometimes anything but that; and I am aware that I shall be laughed at again. But I care not. . . . I shall relate with the same frankness as formerly; and in all, relating either to others or myself, speak fearlessly and unreservedly out." And he keeps his word.

He tells us that he was the second of four sons by the same father and mother, Robert Hogg, and Margaret Laidlaw, and was born the 25th January, 1772. The parish register, however, records his baptism on the 9th December, 1770, and his birth may have taken place some considerable time before. He himself was decided as to the day and month, it being the anniversary of the birth of Burns; and not less decided as to the year, if we may trust a



charmingly characteristic passage in his reminiscences of Scott, who, as we know, was born August 15, 1771: "There are not above five people in the world who, I think, know Sir Walter better, or understand his character better than I do: *and if I outlive him, which is likely, as I am five months and ten days younger*, I shall draw a mental portrait of him, the likeness of which to the original shall not be disputed." He did outlive Scott, just three years and two months (let us be as precise as himself), dying November 21, 1835 (in his sixty-fourth year, says Mr. Thomson, after correcting Hogg's birth-date!); and in 1834 he published the "Domestic Manners and Private Life of Sir Walter Scott," wherein he exclaims, with honest and reverent enthusiasm: "Is it not a proud boast for an old shepherd, that for thirty years he could call this man 'friend,' and associate with him every day and hour that he chose? Yes, it is my proudest boast. Sir Walter sought me out in the wilderness and attached himself to me before I had ever seen him, and although I took cross fits with him, his interest in me never subsided for one day or one moment." As we shall find when we get farther on.

He was born in a lowly cottage at Ettrickhall, near the church and school, his father being a shepherd. No Southron swinish associations defiled the family name, which was rather exceedingly appropriate, *hog*, or *hogg*, in their venacular meaning, a year-old sheep; and they were indeed of right good Border descent, claiming from Haug of Norway, a valiant viking and reiver, whose successors were the Hoggs of Fauldshope, a farm about five miles from Selkirk,

who held in fee from Scott's ancestors, the Knights of Harden and Oakwood, until their own extravagance and the pacification of the Borders reduced them to the occupation of shepherds. In "The Fray of Elibank," Hogg celebrates his redoubted ancestor the Wild Boar of Fauldshope, chief champion of that Harden who was eldest son of Mary Scott, the famous Flower of Yarrow; and records not without pride, that several of the wives of Fauldshope were accounted rank witches, the most notable being Lucky Hogg, who turned Michael Scott himself into a hare, and baited all his own dogs upon him, so that he escaped with difficulty; but he took therefor a terrible revenge, as told by Hogg in a Note to "The Queen's Wake," in accordance with the popular tradition and correction of Sir Walter Scott. In the "Pilgrims of the Sun" he bedevils viking Haug into Hugo of Norrøway, a pious and peaceful minstrel, who marries Mary Lee of Carelha', and is an utterly impossible milksop:—

"For he loved not the field of foray and scathe,  
Nor the bow, nor the shield, nor the sword of death;  
But he tuned his harp in the wild unseen,  
And he reared his flocks on the mountain green."

For which damnable namby-pamby defamation of old Norse and Border character, and that in an ancestor of his own, it has doubtless fared full hard with the poor shepherd's wraith if ever it forgathered with that of grim Haug or the Wild Boar of Fauldshope. His mother was of the Laidlaws of Phaup and Craik, a woman of strong natural talents and humour, and remarkable for her knowledge of Border

lore, in ballads, songs, and traditions, so that her cottage was a favourite resort of the shepherds of Ettrick and Yarrow. In the "Shepherd's Calendar," he celebrates one of her ancestors, Will o' Phaup, "one of the genuine Laidlaws of Craik," a famous runner, fighter, and good fellow, and the last man of that wild region who was on intimate terms with the fairies. The father, about the time of his marriage, having saved a considerable sum of money, took a lease of the farms of Ettrick House and Ettrick Hall, and commenced dealing in sheep. A sudden fall in the price of these, and the absconding of his principal debtor, ruined him when our Hogg was in his sixth year; everything was sold by auction, and the family was turned out of doors without a farthing in the world. A good man, Brydon of Crosslee, had compassion, took a short lease of the Ettrick House, made the father his shepherd there, and was kind to them all till the day of his death. Hogg had attended school a short time; had the honour of heading a class that read the shorter catechism and the Proverbs of Solomon. But he had now to help earn his living, and at Whitsuntide, when he was seven, was hired by a neighbouring farmer to herd a few cows; his wages for the half-year being a ewe lamb and a pair of new shoes. He records: "Even at that early age my fancy seems to have been a hard neighbour for both judgment and memory. I was wont to strip off my clothes, and run races against time, or rather against myself; and, in the course of these exploits, which I accomplished much to my own admiration, I first lost my plaid, then my bonnet, then my coat, and finally my hosen;

for, as for shoes, I had none. In that naked state did I herd for several days, till a shepherd and maid-servant were sent to the hills to look for them, and found them all." The winter quarter he was sent to school again, got into the class that read the Bible, and tried at writing copy lines of text in inch-long letters. This finished his schooling, of which he had about half a year in all. His real education, apart from mechanical reading and writing, was due to his mother's Border lore and his pastoral life; and these served him well in the future, far better, indeed, than what is called a good commercial or even classical training in a town would probably have done. He went back in spring to herding cows, the lowest of rural occupations, and was engaged in it several years under sundry masters, till he attained the honour of keeping sheep. Here is one little bit of childish romance in his own words: "It will scarcely be believed that at so early an age I should have been an admirer of the other sex. It is nevertheless strictly true. Indeed I have liked the women a great deal better than the men ever since I remember. But that summer, when only eight years of age, I was sent out to a height called Broad-heads with a rosy-cheeked maiden to herd a flock of new-weaned lambs, and I had my mischievous cows to herd besides. But, as she had no dog and I had an excellent one, I was ordered to keep close by her. Never was a master's orders better obeyed. Day after day I herded the cows and the lambs both, and Betty had nothing to do but sit and sew. Then we dined together every day at a well near to the Shielsike head, and after

dinner I laid my head down on her lap, covered her bare feet with my plaid, and pretended to fall sound asleep. One day I heard her say to herself, 'Poor little laddie! he's just tired to death,' and then I wept till I was afraid she would feel the warm tears trickling on her knee. I wished my master, who was a handsome young man, would fall in love with her and marry her, wondering how he could be so blind and stupid as not to do it. But I thought if I were he, I would know well what to do."

He thinks that he changed masters so often because he was yearly growing stronger, and thus fit for harder tasks and higher wage; he was always recommended from one to the other, especially for his inoffensive behaviour. "This character, which I some way or other got at my very first outset, has in some degree attended me ever since, and has certainly been of utility to me; yet, though Solomon avers, that 'a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches,' I declare that I have never been so much benefited by mine, but that I would have chosen the latter by many degrees." He had sometimes very hard usage, and was nearly exhausted by hunger and fatigue. Every small pittance of wage he took to his parents, who in return clothed him as they could. His only book was the Bible: the metrical version of the Psalms at the end he nearly learned by heart, and always liked. When fourteen he managed to save five shillings and buy a fiddle, which occupied all his leisure hours, and was his favourite amusement ever after. Sleeping always in stables or cow-houses, his sawing at night usually disturbed nobody but himself and the quadrupeds,

“whom I believed to be greatly delighted with my strains. At all events, they never complained, which the biped part of my neighbours did frequently, to my pity and utter indignation.” At length, having passed the stage of farm drudge of all work, he arrived at the dignity of shepherd to Laidlaw of Willenslee, and here, in his eighteenth year, got his first perusal of Allan Ramsay’s “Gentle Shepherd” and Blind Harry’s “Life and Adventures of Sir William Wallace,” as modernised by Hamilton of Gilbertfield; both, until recently, almost as common in the cottages of the Scottish peasantry as the Bible itself. He was immoderately fond of them, but regretted deeply that they were not in prose, so as to be more intelligible, or even in the metre of the Psalms. In fact, he had nearly lost what little power of reading he had acquired—the Scottish dialect quite confounded him; so that before he got to the end of a line, he had generally lost the rhyme of the preceding; “and if I came to a triplet, a thing of which I had no conception, I commonly read to the foot of the page without perceiving that I had lost the rhyme altogether. I thought the author had been straitened for rhymes, and had just made a part of it do as well as he could without them. Thus, after I got through both works, I found myself much in the same predicament with the man of Eskdalemuir, who had borrowed Bailey’s Dictionary from his neighbour. On returning it, the lender asked him what he thought of it. ‘I dinna ken, man,’ replied he; ‘I have read it all through, but canna say that I understand it; it is the most confused book that ever I saw in my life!’ . . . Mrs. Laidlaw also gave me

sometimes the newspapers, which I pored on with great earnestness—beginning at the date, and reading straight on, through advertisements of houses and lands, balm of Gilead, and everything; and, after all, was often no wiser than when I began. . . . I was about this time [1789] obliged to write a letter to my elder brother, and, having never drawn a pen for such a number of years, I had actually forgotten how to make sundry letters of the alphabet; these I had either to print, or to patch up the words in the best way I could without them.”

At Whitsuntide, 1790, he hired himself to Laidlaw of Black House, on the Douglas Burn in Yarrow, with whom he served as shepherd for ten years, and who treated him rather like a son than a servant, and whom he only left to go and keep home with his parents at Ettrick House, when the eldest brother, William, having married, went to live elsewhere. Here he had the use of a pretty good library, containing Milton, Pope, Thomson, Young, the *Spectator*, several volumes of history and travel, and, of course, a considerable store of theological works. Nor were opportunities wanting for reading, meditation, and writing. The shepherd has at all seasons considerable snatches of leisure; and from the middle of July to the middle of September, when “summering the lambs,” has but to move them from pasture to pasture, the dog doing nearly all the work. His chief associates here were his elder brother, Alexander Laidlaw, then a shepherd, afterwards farmer of Bowerbank, on the border of St. Mary’s Lake; and young William Laidlaw, the son of his employer, the author of “Lucy’s Flitting,” afterwards the steward, amanu-

ensis, and friend of Scott, and for many years the only believer in Hogg's literary abilities, and his warm friend to the last. He thus describes our poet, not yet a poet in verse, on their first acquaintance: "About nineteen years of age, Hogg was rather above the middle height, of faultless symmetry of form; he was of almost unequalled agility and swiftness. His face was then round and full, and of a ruddy complexion, with light blue eyes that beamed with gaiety, glee, and good-humour, the effect of the most exuberant animal spirits. His head was covered with a singular profusion of light-brown hair, which he was obliged to wear coiled up under his hat. On entering church on a Sunday, where he was all his life a regular attender, he used, on lifting his hat, to raise his right hand to assist a graceful shake of his head in laying back his long hair, which rolled down his back and fell below his loins. And every female eye was upon him, as, with light step, he ascended the stair to the gallery where he sat." Among the foremost in all active and athletic exercises, well stocked with songs and ballads, even before he set about composing himself, playing the violin with heart and soul, handsome and good humoured, he was always welcome company among the lads and lassies. In his old age he sang, with humour not unpathetic, of himself when young, and that fire-streaming Norse mane of his, in "The Cutting o' My Hair":—

" Myself for speed had not my marrow  
Thro' Teviot, Ettrick, Tweed, and Yarrow;  
Strang, straight, and swift like wingèd arrow  
At market, tryst, or fair.



But now I'm turn'd a hirplin carle,  
 My back it's ta'en the cobbler's swirl,  
 And deil a bodle I need birl  
     For cuttin' o' my hair.

“ On Boswell's green was nane like me ;  
 My hough was firm, my foot was free ;  
 The locks that clustered o'er my bree  
     Cost many a hizzie sair.  
 The days are come I'm no sae crouse—  
 An ingle-cheek—a cogie douce,  
 An' fash nae shears about the house  
     Wi' cuttin' o' my hair.

“ It was an awfu' head, I trow,  
 It waur'd baith young and old to cow,  
 An' burnin' red as heather-lowie,  
     Gar'd neeboors start and stare.  
 The mair ye cut the mair it grew,  
 An' aye the fiercer flamed its hue—  
 I in my time hae paid enew  
     For cuttin' o' my hair.”

He first began to write verses in the spring of 1796, and for several years composed only songs and ballads for the lassies to sing in chorus ; and proud he was to hear them sung, and himself saluted as “ Jamie the poeter.” “ I had no more difficulty in composing songs then than I have at present, and I was equally well pleased with them. But then the writing of them—that was a job ! I had no method of learning to write, save by following the Italian alphabet ; and, though I always stripped myself of coat and vest when I began to pen a song, yet my wrist took a cramp, so that I could rarely make above five or six lines at a sitting. Having very little time to spare from my flock, which was unruly enough, I folded and stitched

a few sheets of paper, which I carried in my pocket. I had no inkhorn, but, in place of it, I borrowed a small phial, which I fixed in a hole in the breast of my waistcoat, and having a cork fastened by a piece of twine, it answered the purpose fully as well. Whenever a leisure minute or two offered, I sat down and wrote out my thoughts as I found them. This is my invariable practice in writing prose. I cannot make out one sentence by study, without the pen in my hand to catch the ideas as they arise, and I never write two copies of the same thing. My manner of composing poetry is very different. Let the piece be of what length it will, I compose and correct it wholly in my mind, or on a slate, or ever I put pen to paper; and then I write it down as fast as the A B C."

"The first time I ever heard of Burns was in 1797, the year after he died. One day during that summer a half-daft man, named John Scott, came to me on the hill, and, to amuse me, repeated 'Tam O'Shanter.' I was delighted! I was far more than delighted—I was ravished! Before Jock Scott left me I could recite the poem from beginning to end, and it has remained my favourite ever since. He told me it was made by one Robert Burns, the sweetest poet that ever was born; but that he was now dead, and that his place would never be supplied. . . . This formed a new epoch in my life. Every day I pondered on the genius and fate of Burns. I wept, and always thought with myself—what is to hinder me from succeeding Burns? I, too, was born on the 25th of January, and I have much more time to read and compose than any ploughman could have, and can sing more old songs than ever ploughman could

in the world. But then I wept again, because I could not write. However, I resolved to be a poet, and to follow in the steps of Burns."

## II

A little more must be given, and as much of it as possible in his own characteristic language, concerning the youth of Hogg; not only because it is biographically the most interesting part of his life, but because it illustrates the general life and character of that noble peasantry of which he is but a type; a brilliant type in literature, no doubt, especially when account is taken of his uncommon lack of early schooling; but scarcely a brilliant type—perhaps, indeed, rather below than above the average—in sound sense, clear intellect, sterling strength and depth of nature. Few contrasts appear more startling than that between the South Scottish (not to speak of the Highlanders) and South English peasantry, until the recent re-awakening of these, hailed with astonishment by their most sanguine friends, so profoundly hopeless seemed the long torpor, the stolid degradation. The former were perchance quite as poor as the latter; but their poverty was free from intellectual and moral squalidness, nor was the farm-servant socially separated from the farmer, so as to be looked down upon as a serf while not looked after as a serf, whose strength and well-being are of not less value to the master than those of his horse and his ox. The spirit of the former was nourished and sustained by lofty memories, patriotic and religious; the heart and the imagination were fed

with chivalrous and romantic traditions, with ballads and songs of rich geniality, beauty, and humour—the latter were yet more brutally starved in mind and spirit than in body, with a poaching exploit for their highest romance of daring. The contrast came out conspicuously in their merry-meetings: those of the former merry indeed, with sweet song and swift dance; those of the latter a heavy, beery muddlement, whose dance was an uncouth lurching shuffle, whose song was the dreariest of long-drawn tuneless doggerel. Poor “ill-used race of men that till the soil!” well might one of them declare at their Conference recently, “Mr. Arch has taught us more in five years than the parsons did in five hundred.”

Hogg, with his brother, the two Laidlaws, and a few others, “formed themselves into a sort of literary society, which met periodically, at one or other of the houses of its members, where each read an essay on a subject previously given out; and after that, every essay was minutely investigated and criticised.” In his interesting paper on “Storms,” full-charged with personal experience, he tells us that one of these meetings was fixed for Friday, the 23rd January, 1794, and to be held at Entertrony, a wild and remote shieling at the very source of the Ettrick. “I had the honour of being named as preses—so, leaving the charge of my flock with my master, off I set from Blackhouse, on Thursday, a very ill day, with a flaming bombastical essay in my pocket, and my tongue trained to many wise and profound remarks, to attend this extraordinary meeting; though the place lay at the distance of twenty miles, over the wildest hills in the kingdom. I remained that night

with my parents at Ettrick House, and the next day again set out on my journey." However, he had to turn back with a heavy heart; the terrible snowstorm was brewing which burst between one and two the next morning, and whose effects he so vividly describes—the snowstorm in which seventeen shepherds perished and upwards of thirty others were carried home insensible, while the number of sheep lost far outwent any possibility of calculation. On the *Beds of Esk* alone, and the adjacent shores of the Solway Firth, there were found, when the flood after the storm subsided, 1840 sheep, 9 black cattle, 3 horses, 2 men, 1 woman, 45 dogs, and 180 hares, besides a number of meaner animals; and whole flocks were buried deep in the snow, which lay a week. "The storm was universally regarded as a judgment sent by God for some heinous sin:" but whose, and what? Despite the weather, the meeting was held at Entertrony, and this shieling was in the very vortex of the storm, the very centre of the devastation; and soon the rumour spread through the country-side that these poor young fellows of the mutual improvement society had been engaged in unholy rites, "had raised the deil among them like a great rough dog at the very time the tempest began, and were glad to draw cuts, and gie him ane o' their number to get quit o' him again. How every hair of my head, and inch of my frame, crept at hearing this! for I had a dearly beloved brother who was of the number, several full cousins and intimate acquaintances; indeed, I looked upon the whole fraternity as my brethren, and considered myself involved in all their transactions. I could say no more in defence of the society's proceedings; for,

to tell the truth, though I am ashamed to acknowledge it, I suspected that the allegation might be too true." There was a real ferment in the district for a time, and it is said that legal proceedings were meditated and attempted against the unhallowed evocators, the cause of such stupendous disasters.

It may be mentioned here that in 1793 he had a bit of travel which considerably influenced him, having gone with a flock of his master's sheep to Strathfillan, in Perthshire, and viewed the wild grandeur of the mountains and glens of the West Highlands.

Here is another bit of peasant life worth recording; as Mr. Thomson says, "It was the third Eclogue of Virgil starting into life among the braes of Ettrick—it was Menalcas, Damoetus, and Palæmon preparing to pipe over again, with the stake of a kid against a bicker of beech-wood!" It had better be given in Hogg's own words: "In the spring of 1798 [Mr. Thomson makes it 1796], as Alexander Laidlaw, my brother William, and myself were resting on the side of a hill above Ettrick Church, I happened to drop some hints of my superior talents in poetry. William said that as to putting words into rhyme it was a thing he never could do to any sense; but that if I liked to enter the lists with him in blank verse, he would take me up for any bet I pleased. Laidlaw declared he would venture likewise. This being settled, and the judges named, I accepted the challenge; but a dispute arising respecting the subject, we were obliged to resort to the following mode of decision. Ten subjects having been named, the lots were cast, and that which fell to be elucidated by our matchless pens was *the stars!*—things which we knew

little more about than merely that they were burning and twinkling over us, and to be seen every night when the clouds were away. I began with high hopes and great warmth, and in a week declared my theme ready for the comparison; Laidlaw announced his next week; but my brother made us wait a full half-year, and then, on being urged, presented his unfinished. The arbiters were then dispersed, and the cause was never properly judged; but those to whom they were shown rather gave the preference to my brother's. This is certain, that it was far superior to either of the other two in the sublimity of the ideas; but, besides being in bad measure, it was often bombastical. The title of it was 'Urania's Tour;' that of Laidlaw's 'Astronomical Thoughts'; and that of mine 'Reflections on a View of the Nocturnal Heavens.'" The magniloquent titles of these peasant lads are delicious.

"In 1801 [when he was twenty-nine according to his own account, or thirty-one according to Mr. Thomson], believing I was then become a grand poet, I sapiently determined on publishing a pamphlet, and appealing to the world at once. This noble resolution was no sooner taken than executed, a proceeding much of a piece with many of my subsequent transactions. Having attended the Edinburgh market one Monday with a number of sheep for sale, and being unable to dispose of them all, I put the remainder into a park until the market on Wednesday. Not knowing how to pass the interim, it came into my head that I would write a poem or two from my memory and get them printed. The thought had no sooner struck me than it was put in practice; and I

was obliged to select, not the best poems, but those that I remembered best. I wrote several of these during my short stay, and gave them all to a person to print at my expense ; and having sold off my sheep on Wednesday morning, I returned to the Forest. I saw no more of my poems until I received word that there were 1000 copies thrown off. I knew no more about publishing than the man of the moon ; and the only motive that influenced me was the gratification of my vanity by seeing my works in print. But no sooner did the first copy come to hand than my eyes were open to the folly of my conduct ; for, on comparing it with the MS. which I had at home, I found many of the stanzas omitted, others misplaced, and typographical errors abounding in every page."

Having thus launched him on the still-vext sea of literature, let me note as briefly as possible the principal events of the remainder of his after-life, interspersing and adding a few characteristic anecdotes and sketches of and by some of his well-known contemporaries.

In the autumn of 1802 [Hogg says summer of 1801], he first met Walter Scott ; who, as the "Shirrah" of Selkirkshire, was a little king in the Forest, and who was then making a "raid" in the wilds of Yarrow to collect old songs and ballads for the third volume of the "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border." Hogg records graphically his dare-devil riding and boating (leistering kippers in Tweed), and instances of his marvellous memory. Hogg's mother delighted him by chanting the ballad of "Old Maitlan'," and when he asked her whether she thought it had ever been printed, the outspoken dame replied : "Oo, na, na,



sir, it was never printed i' the world. . . . But mair nor that, except 'George Warton' and 'James Steward,' there was never ane o' my sangs prentit till ye prentit them yoursell, an' ye hae spoilt them a'thegither. They war made for singing, an' no for reading; an' they're nouthier right spelled nor right setten down." "Heh-heh-heh! Take ye that, Mr. Scott," said Laidlaw; and Scott laughed heartily.

After two or three journeys to the Highlands and Hebrides, Hogg with another took a sheep farm in the island of Harris; but the tacksman's right to it was disputed, and our shepherd lost by the affair the £200 he had saved during his ten years' service at Blackhouse. Fortunately he was of a most buoyant nature. He went and sojourned among the lakes of Cumberland; then cheerfully hired himself, in 1804, as shepherd to Mr. Harkness, of Mitchell Slack, in Nithsdale, herding on the great solitary hill of Queensberry, again in a ragged coat and barefooted. Hither came Allan Cunningham, then apprentice to a stonemason, with a much older brother, on a pilgrimage of hero-worship; just as Allan once walked all the way to Edinburgh, merely to catch a glimpse of Scott in the street. Hogg saw the two approaching, and wondered who they could be; and when the elder, James Cunningham, asked whether he was himself, "I answered cautiously in the affirmative, for I was afraid they were come to look after me with an accusation regarding some of the lasses. The younger stood at a respectful distance, as if I had been the Duke of Queensberry, instead of a ragged servant lad [age about 34] herding sheep. The other seized my hand and said, 'Well, then, sir, I am glad to see you.

There is not a man in Scotland whose hand I am prouder to hold.' . . . He continued: 'This is my brother Allan, the greatest admirer that you have on earth, and himself a young aspiring poet of some promise. You will be so kind as to excuse this intrusion of ours on your solitude, for, in truth, I could get no peace either night or day with Allan till I consented to come and see you.'" Whence we may see that the intense hero-worship of Carlyle is not a distinctive personal passion, but rather indigenous to his native soil. Allan was then "a dark ungainly youth of about eighteen, with a boardly frame for his age, and strongly marked, manly features—the very model of Burns, and exactly such a man. Had they been of the same age, it would not have been easy to distinguish the one from the other." Here, without detracting Cunningham, I venture to differ from Hogg, opining that the living physiognomy of Burns was as unique in its fiery splendour as his genius. Hogg went down to Allan; they had a firm hand-grip, and from that moment were friends, being both enthusiasts for the same things. Hogg goes on: "I had a small bothy upon the hill, in which I took my breakfast and dinner on wet days, and rested myself. It was so small that we had to walk in on all-fours; and when we were in we could not get up our heads any way but in a sitting posture. It was exactly my own length, and on the one side I had a bed of rushes, which served likewise as a seat; on this we all three sat down, and there we spent the whole afternoon, and I am sure a happier group of three never met on the hill of Queensberry. Allan brightened up

prodigiously after he got into the dark bothy, repeating all his early pieces of poetry, and part of his brother's [Thomas Mouncey Cunningham] to me. The two partook heartily, and without reserve, of my scrip and bottle of sweet milk; and the elder had a strong bottle with him—I have forgot whether it was brandy or rum, but I remember it was excessively good, and helped to keep up our spirits to a late hour." Hogg after this often visited them at Dalswinton, and he and Allan were firm friends to the last. When, in 1810, Cromek brought out the "Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song," Hogg at once declared that Allan Cunningham was the author of all that was beautiful in the work, and found Scott decidedly of the same opinion; "and he wished to God we had that valuable and original young man [then about 25; born 1785] fairly out of Cromek's hands again."

Meanwhile, excited by the "Minstrelsy," Hogg had been gathering old Border traditions and turning many of them into new-old ballads. These Scott warmly praised, and the next time Hogg went to Edinburgh with sheep he waited on Scott to ask his influence toward their publication. Scott invited him and Laidlaw to dinner in Castle Street. The good shepherd was quite aware that his manners were rustical and not urbane, but thought he could never do wrong to copy the lady of the house; so, finding Mrs. Scott, then in delicate health, reclining on a sofa in the drawing-room, he made his best bow and stretched himself at full length on another sofa opposite hers. Lockhart, who tells the story in his "Life of Scott," goes on: "As his dress at this period was

precisely that in which any ordinary herdsman attends cattle to the market, and as his hands, moreover, bore most legible marks of a recent sheep-smearing, the lady of the house did not observe with perfect equanimity the novel usage to which her chintz was exposed. 'The shepherd, however, remarked nothing of all this—dined heartily and drank freely, and by jest, anecdote, and song, afforded plentiful merriment to the more civilised part of the company. As the liquor operated, his familiarity increased and strengthened; from 'Mr. Scott' he advanced to 'Sherra,' and thence to 'Scott,' 'Walter,' and 'Wattie'—until, at supper, he fairly convulsed the whole party by addressing Mrs. Scott as 'Charlotte.'" Here be it noted once for all, though the remark scarcely applies to the preceding quotation, save to the word "civilised," where "polished" would have been not only kindlier but more accurate, that Lockhart throughout speaks of Hogg in a carping, depreciatory style, which does far more discredit to the writer than to his subject. Large-natured, genial men of genius, like Scott and Wilson, could easily condone the shepherd's rough oddities and all the petulances of his most frank vanity; but Lockhart was neither a genius nor large-natured—he was merely very clever, narrow, and bitter, "the scorpion that stings the faces of men," as he is termed by himself or his associates in the "Chaldee Manuscript," for he not only wrote but drew keen caricatures.\*

\* Whether or not his own sponsor, he was rather proud of the name. Thus in a letter from London to Wilson (March, '44), he writes, disgusted with the bishops: "I forget if [the sharp *Quarterly* editor should have written *whether*] it is Swift or Scorpio who sang:—

Moreover, he had a real love and reverence for at least one man, his father-in-law, Scott, and in his last mention of Hogg in the "Life," he affirms "he did not follow his best benefactor until he had insulted his dust." For myself, I have met with nothing to sustain this charge, which probably refers to Hogg's "Domestic Manners and Private Life of Sir Walter Scott," published in 1834; a subject which, as Mr. Thomson suggests, Lockhart, as Scott's literary executor, seems to have regarded as exclusively his own; however, it is not hard to conceive how Lockhart's natural acerbity must have been increased by the insult, real or imaginary, to the one idol of his mind not given to worship. Perhaps the two brothers Chambers will be accepted as pretty shrewd business-like judges of character; and thus they speak, after the death of Hogg ("Memoir of Robert Chambers, with Autobiographic Reminiscences of William")—William: "I saw him first at my brother's house in 1830 [Hogg then 60; William 30; Robert 28], and was much amused with his blunt simplicity of character and good nature. It did not seem as if he had the slightest veneration for any one more than another whom he addressed, no matter what was their rank and position." Which lack of reverence for rank and

"' Powers Episcopal, we know,  
Must from some Apostle flow;  
But I'll never be so rude as  
Ask how many draw from Judas.'"

Lockhart to Swift is indeed as a scorpion to a fiery dragon, but the epigram might have been thrown off by the great master; although it may be objected that Judas, though a disciple, was not in the ordinary sense an apostle; but epigrams and Macaulay antitheses are characterised likewise as to fact and truth.

position—not, mark, of real reverence for genius and worth—I find far more singular than deplorable. Robert: “While thus recalling, for the amusement of an idle hour, some of the whimsical scenes in which we have met James Hogg [of which something hereafter], let it not be supposed that we think of him only with a regard to the homely manners, the social good-nature, and the unimportant foibles by which he was characterised. The world amidst which he moved was but too apt, especially of late years, to regard him in these lights alone, forgetting that beneath his rustic plaid there beat one of the kindest and most unperverted of hearts, while his bonnet covered the head from which had sprung ‘Kilmeny’ and ‘Donald Macdonald.’”

At the close of 1803 Hogg writes to Scott, apologising for getting half-seas over that night at Castle Street, “for I cannot, for my life, recollect what passed when it was late;” expressing his gratitude for what he did recollect, “the filial [the shepherd doubtless means *paternal*] injunction you gave at parting, cautioning me against being ensnared by the loose women in town,” and “the utter abhorrence I inherit at those seminaries of lewdness;” speaking of his proposed publication of the “Mountain Bard,” which he dedicated to Scott; asking whether his own graven image on the first leaf would be any recommendation; and, a rich joke strangely worded, asking also “if we might front the songs with a letter to you, giving an impartial account of my manner of life and education, and which if you pleased to transcribe, putting He for I.” Scott, of course, could not go quite so far as this, but did all he could with the

publishers and to procure influential subscribers, of whom above 500 were secured; Constable (who brought out the work) giving Hogg a half-guinea copy for each, in addition to a small sum of money; he likewise gave him £86 for "that celebrated work, 'Hogg on Sheep,' and I was now richer than ever I was before." His mode of dealing with his subscribers was characteristic: "I had no regular plan of delivering those copies that were subscribed for, but sent them simply to the people, intending to take their money in return; but, though some paid me double, triple, and even ten times the price, about one third of my subscribers thought proper to take the copies for nothing, never paying for them to this day."

### III

"Master of nearly £300, I went perfectly mad." He took a pasture farm for a great deal more than it was worth, and added to it another, the two needing about ten times his capital. Here he blundered and struggled on for three years, then let his creditors take all, without getting from them any settlement. "None of these matters had the least effect in depressing my spirits—I was generally rather most cheerful when most unfortunate." He would go back to herding; but all Ettrick looked upon him askance as a ne'er-do-weel, reckless, and unstable, and none even of his old employers would take him back. So in February, 1810, he went to Edinburgh, in utter desperation, determined to push his fortune as a literary man. Constable, reluctant but friendly,

published his "Forest Minstrel," which had small success; and all that Hogg got by it was a hundred guineas from Harriet, Countess of Dalkeith, afterwards Duchess of Buccleuch, of whom and her husband, Charles, the fourth duke, we learn so much in the "Life of Scott." Our daunted rustic thereupon resolved to educate the benighted society of the capital in the *belles lettres*, morals, and criticism! In September, 1810, he began, and actually continued for a year, the *Spy*, a weekly journal with this modest intent, with some casual assistance from others, but the greater part written by himself; and, stranger still, the paper paid its expenses, until certain indecorums set all the literary ladies against it and shocked off many subscribers. During this time he was supported by an old Ettrick friend, then a thriving hat manufacturer—"a man of cultivated mind and generous disposition," says Lockhart; "a friend of my father's, a man of good judgment, and refined and elegant pursuits," says Wilson's daughter in the "Memoir"—Mr. John Grieve, who had firm faith in the genius of Hogg as well as great delight in his company, who kept him in his own house the first six months, and whose partner, a Mr. Scott, became as firmly attached as himself to the simple poet. "They suffered me to want for nothing, either in money or clothes; I did not even need to ask these. Mr. Grieve was always the first to notice my wants, and prevent them. In short, they would not suffer me to be obliged to anyone but themselves for the value of a farthing; and without this support I could never have fought my way in Edinbro'. I was fairly starved into it, and if it had not been for Messrs. Grieve and Scott, would,



in a very short time, have been starved out of it again." And we may be sure that their practical business common-sense controlled and extinguished many a wild impracticable scheme of his.

Early in 1813 he published the "Queen's Wake," which includes "Kilmeny" and others of his best and most popular pieces. No one had seen it in MS., and the day after it came out Hogg walked about the streets, read its title in the booksellers' windows, and was like a man between death and life, waiting for the verdict of the jury. In the High Street an Ettrick man, rough but sagacious, William Dunlop, crossed over to him, and thus cheered him up: "Ye useless poetical deevil that ye're! what hae ye been doing a' this time?"—"What doing, Willie! what do you mean?"—"Ye hae been pestering us wi' four-penny papers and daft shilly-shally sangs, an' bletherin' an' speakin' i' the Forum [a debating society], an' yet had stuff in ye to produce a thing like this!"—"Ay, Willie, have you seen my new beuk!"—"Ay, faith, that I have, man; and it has cheated me out o' a night's sleep. Ye hae hit the right nail on the head now. Yon's the very thing, sir."—"I'm very glad to hear you say sae, Willie; but what do ye ken about poems?"—"Never ye mind how I ken; I gie ye my word for it, yon's the thing that will do. If ye hadna made a fool o' yoursel' afore, man, yon wad hae sold better than ever a book sold. 'Od! wha wad hae thought there was as muckle in that sheep's-head o' yours?" And Willie went away, laughing and mis-calling Hogg over his shoulder. Two editions went off quickly, and a third was prepared, when his publisher, a young man with little capital and less influ-

ence, went bankrupt; and the poor shepherd lost all the profits on which he had relied for subsistence and the payment of some old farming debts. This failure introduced him to Blackwood, who was one of the trustees of the bankrupt's estate, and who helped to secure for Hogg about half of the third edition (the other half, he says, had been got rid of somehow in a week), and sold it for him on commission, and ultimately paid him more than double of what he was to have received from the first publisher.

About this time he made the acquaintance of Wilson, whose "Isle of Palms" he had extolled in the *Scottish Review*, and whom he was exceedingly anxious to meet. "All I could learn of him was, that he was a man from the mountains in Wales, or the West of England, with hair like eagles' feathers and nails like birds' claws, a red beard, and an uncommon degree of wildness in his looks." Hogg at length wrote inviting him to dine, Wilson came, and the two with Grieve had a jolly evening together. As Hogg modestly puts it: "I found him so much a man according to my own heart, that for many years we were seldom twenty-four hours asunder when in town." Hogg went and spent a month with him at Elleray, and on his way thither made the personal acquaintance of Southey. Hogg, putting up for the night at an inn in Keswick, sent a note to Greta Hall; Southey came to him, and made him spend two days at the Hall. Let Hogg himself speak: "Before we had been ten minutes together my heart was knit to Southey, and every hour thereafter my esteem for him increased. . . . But I was as grieved as well as an astonished man, when I found that he refused all

participation in my beverage of rum punch. For a poet to refuse his glass was to me a phenomenon ; and I confess I doubted in my own mind, and doubt to this day, if perfect sobriety and transcendent poetical genius can exist together. In Scotland I am sure they cannot. With regard to the English, I shall leave them to settle that among themselves, as they have little that is worth drinking." There's a noble Scottish note for us ! And the justice of Hogg's literary opinion is sustained by the fact that all Southey's great epics are dead as coffin-nails. As to his bibulous judgment, it concerns "those who labour under the disadvantage of having been born on the south side of the Tweed" to controvert it if they can ; let them but send liberal samples of their best in every kind to the present writer, and he will give an impartial verdict.

In these years Hogg generally had a summer tour in the Highlands, tours which well served him in his authorship. He went on thenceforth writing poems, tales, and sketches, which need not be here particularised, as they are easily accessible in the edition noted at the beginning of these articles. In the spring of 1814, having no home wherein to shelter his parents, each over eighty-four years of age, he wrote to his generous patroness, Harriet, Duchess of Buccleuch, indirectly asking for a farm ; she kept his want in mind, but died in August ; the good Duke then said to Scott : " My friend, I must now consider this poor man's case as *her* legacy," and presented him with the small farm of Altrive Lake, in the wilds of Yarrow. The Duke's letter said : " The rent shall be nominal ;" in fact no rent was ever mentioned or

paid. Hogg had now a "cosie bield," and, with a little more prudence and a little less simple good-nature, might have had a comfortable livelihood for the rest of his days. Having married an excellent wife in 1820, a young family grew around him, and he extended his farming operations by leasing Mount-Benger for nine years, losing more than £2000 on it before he got free. Then his literary engagements and undertakings, though they brought him very considerable sums of money (he reckons £750 in a certain two years, besides small sums in cash), probably cost him much, by distracting his attention from his farms and carrying him frequently to Edinburgh. Last, and worst of all, those profitless pests the idle notoriety-hunters, were devastators not only of his time but also of his substance; for, there being no inn in the neighbourhood, they made his poor cottage, which he had to enlarge, their inn—an inn without charges, abusing his hospitality most damnable, after the manner of their kind. A friend once going to dine with the family, no one else to be present, counted fourteen others feeding there before the day was done. The Shepherd, accompanying a friend one evening, looked back on his home, buzzing with company, and said: "My bit house is e'en now just like a bee-skep, fu' o' happy leevin' creatures—and nae doubt, like a bee-skep, it will hae to cast some day, when it can haud its inhabitants nae langer." To the question of Allan Cunningham, "What is your pen about now, Mr. Hogg?" he answered, "Pen! it might as well be in the goose's wing; I cannot get writing any for the visits of my friends: I'm never a day without some." And if he could not

get writing any we may be sure he could not get farming much, through these same admirable "friends," the devouring locusts borne on the winds of vanity.

But I anticipate. While waiting to take over Altrive, he devised how to get capital for working it, and his devise was to obtain pieces from the most popular poets of the day, and publish them in a volume. He doubtless would have cheerfully given a piece to help any brother bard in similar case. Some gave, others promised but did not give; and in the end he wrote all the "Poetic Mirror" himself, under the names of the various poets. Scott, who had an aversion to joint-stock authorship, and one of whose favourite proverbs was "Every herring should hang by its own head," firmly refused to take part in the first scheme; Hogg, in a furious fit of childish rage, wrote to him, beginning "Damned Sir," and ending "Believe me, Sir, yours with disgust," &c. The great-hearted took no notice; but Hogg, with that candour which redeems all his faults, tells us how when he lay dangerously ill with an inflammatory fever (the result of five or six weeks of the Bacchanalian "Right and Wrong Club"), Scott called every day on returning from the Parliament House to inquire after him, and enjoined Mr. Grieve to let no pecuniary consideration whatever prevent his having the best medical advice, "for I shall see it paid;" and further enjoined that Hogg should not be told of this. "I would fain have called, but I knew not how I would be received;" "and this, too," says Hogg, "after I had renounced his friendship, and told him that I held both it and his literary talents in contempt!" Hogg learnt all this some time after

by accident, and, vehement in penitence as in wrath, wrote to his outraged patron and friend: "I desire not a renewal of our former intimacy, for haply, after what I have written, your family would not suffer it; but I wish it to be understood that, when we meet *by chance*, we might shake hands and speak to one another as old acquaintances, and likewise that we may exchange a letter occasionally, for I find there are many things which I yearn to communicate to you, and the tears rush to my eyes when I consider that I may not." Scott's answer was a brief note telling him to think no more of the affair, and to come to breakfast the next morning. Hogg went, and more than once tried to come to a full explanation, but Scott always parried and evaded and baffled him, and was his best friend to the last. Hogg tells us further: "Mr. Wilson once drove me also into an ungovernable rage by turning a long and elaborate poem of mine on 'Field of Waterloo' into ridicule, on learning which I sent him a letter which I thought was a tickler. There was scarcely an abusive epithet in our language that I did not call him by. My letter, however, had not the desired effect; the opprobrious names proved only a source of amusement to Wilson, and he sent me a letter of explanation and apology, which knit my heart closer to him than ever."

Hogg claimed "the honour of being the beginner, and almost sole instigator of *Blackwood's Magazine*," admitting that when he first mentioned the plan to Old Ebony, that enterprising publisher said that he had been for some time revolving a similar scheme. Hogg undoubtedly originated the "Chaldee Manu-

script," of which, as it appeared, Ferrier gives him about forty verses (though he sent many more), the rest being mainly due to Wilson and Lockhart. Hogg had many a tiff with Blackwood and his associates, who put the Shepherd's name to all sorts of things he never wrote, and who, Lockhart especially, were continually mystifying him; and he had another quarrel with Wilson, *i.e.*, a quarrel all on his own side, about the way in which he was exhibited in the "Noctes," though these, by the notoriety they gave him, must have immensely increased his literary earnings. The "Chaldee MS." Hogg always looked upon as an innocent joke, and could never understand why people got in a rage about it.

In 1832 Hogg visited London to arrange for a complete edition of his works, and stayed there three months. He was of course lionised more than enough; and among other things entertained at a public dinner, at which some two hundred noble and distinguished persons did him honour; but was most pleased because the day was the anniversary of Burns' birth, and two sons of Burns sat on the left of the president (Sir John Malcolm), and after dinner he brewed punch in the punch-bowl of Burns, brought from Paisley for the occasion. The projected edition, to be illustrated by George Cruickshanks (so I find it spelt), came to grief with the first volume, through the failure of the publisher, who failed a second time with another series entrusted to him by the kind-hearted, indiscreet Shepherd. On his return he was welcomed with a public dinner at Peebles, his good friend John Wilson in the chair. His vigorous constitution was now breaking up; and at length, after

a severe illness of four weeks, he died on the 21st of November, 1835. He was buried in the churchyard of Ettrick, near to which he was born ; a plain stone, with name and dates and harp, shows his grave. He left a widow with one son and four daughters, the children all young, and very little for their subsistence. What private beneficence may have done for the poor family, who by their husband and father had such strong claims on the national gratitude, I know not ; but eighteen years elapsed before a royal pension was granted to Mrs. Hogg—giving her and her young ones ample time to perish of starvation ! In 1860 a monument was erected to him midway between the loch of the Lowas and St. Mary's Loch. "There, upon a square pedestal, about ten feet in height, and adorned with characteristic emblems and inscriptions, sits the figure of the poet upon an oak-root, his head slightly depressed towards St. Mary's Loch, which he loved so well, and on the banks of which he was so often visited with his best inspiration, while his favourite dog Hector is couched lovingly at his feet." Even Lockhart, embittered beyond his usual bitterness, terms him "perhaps the most remarkable man that ever wore the *maud* of a shepherd ;" and says of him when Scott first met him in 1801 : "As yet his naturally kind and simple character had not been exposed to any of the dangerous flatteries of the world ; his heart was pure—his enthusiasm buoyant as that of a happy child ; and well as Scott knew that reflection, sagacity, wit, and wisdom were scattered abundantly among the humblest rangers of these pastoral solitudes, there was here a depth and a brightness that filled him with wonder, combined with



a quaintness of humour, and a thousand little touches of absurdity, which afforded him more entertainment, as I have heard him say, than the best comedy that ever set the pit in a roar." The national monument came somewhat earlier than Christopher North, in 1824, predicted: "My beloved shepherd, some half-century hence your effigy will be seen on some bonny green knowe in the forest, with its honest face looking across St. Mary's Loch, and up towards the Grey Mare's Tail, while by moonlight all your own fairies will weave a dance round its pedestal."

In the "Memoir of Robert Chambers," already cited, an article is reprinted from *Chambers's Journal* (started in 1832), entitled "The Candlemaker Row Festival," written by him soon after the death of the Shepherd, and giving some pleasant particulars concerning him when about sixty years old. I select and condense from this the following: Hogg in his latter days visited Edinburgh for a week or two once or twice a year; nominally staying at Watson's Selkirk and Peebles Inn, in Candlemaker Row, really dining, supping, and breakfasting with his many friends. These were of all stations, from Scott and the *Blackwood* men to humble shopkeepers, poor clerks, and poorer poets; and amongst all the Shepherd was the same plain, good-humoured, unsophisticated man as he had been thirty years when tending his flocks among his native hills. (This agrees not with Lockhart's implication; and I would here rather take the word of the printer than of his offended high mightiness of the *Quarterly*.) Feeling uneasy that his residence at Watson's was thus reduced to a mere affair of lodging, he made up for it by gathering on

the last night of his stay a very multitude to sup with him, of all ranks and ages and coats, of course for the good of the house at the expense of himself. In the forenoon, making his farewell calls, he would mention incidentally that two or three were to meet him at night, at nine, and that the friend to whom he was speaking, with any of his friends, would be welcome. All the warning Watson got was a hint from Hogg as he went out that *twae-three* lads had been speaking of supping there that night. Watson knew of old what *twae-three* meant, and laid out his largest room with a double range of tables, enough for sixty or seventy guests. Hogg stood in the corner of one of the largest bedrooms to receive his company; each friend as he brought in his train trying to introduce each separately, parried by Hogg with a "Ou ay, we'll be a' weel acquent by-and-by." Having filled chairs, bed, and standing space, another and yet another bedroom had to be thrown open for the reception. About ten, when nearly the whole house seemed "panged," supper was announced, and a grand rush ensued. The local officials took the places of honour; the Commissioner of Police for the ward—a very great man—in the chair, the Bailie and the Moderator of the Society of High Constables (what swelling titles the bodies have!) croupiers. The rest seat themselves as they can, and many are left seatless till a new table is rigged up along the side of the room. A mixed company! Meal-dealers from the Grassmarket, genteel young men from the Parliament House, printers from the Cowgate, booksellers from the New Town; advocates, grocers, bakers, shop-lads from the Lucken-booths; a young probationer, doubting whether he

ought to be there, and dreading a late sitting ; young swells with eyeglasses, and among them a rough type of a horse-dealer, shouting out full-bodied jokes to a crony about thirteen men off on the same side ; Selkirkshire store-farmers, Mr. Watson himself, and nearly all the people staying in his house at the time. Supper over, the chairman gave, with all the honours, the approved toasts, King, Royal Family, Army, Navy ; then the toast of the evening, with a genuine bumper, and such eloquent eulogy as this : “ Mr. Hogg is an old acquaintance of mine [let us hope only at such merry meetings], and I have read his works. He has had the merit of raising himself from a humble station to a high place amongst the literary men of his country. When I look around me, gentlemen, at the respectable company here assembled—when I see so many met to do honour [at his expense] to one who was once but a shepherd on a lonely hill—I cannot but feel, gentlemen, that much has been done by Mr. Hogg, and that it is something fine to be a poet. (Great applause.) ” The toast drunk enthusiastically, the Shepherd made his usual acknowledgment : “ Gentlemen, I was ever proud to be called a poet, but I never was so proud as I am this night,” &c. There is now for two hours no more of Hogg ; the municipal bodies have the ball among them, and no one else can get a kick at it. The Chairman gives the Magistrates of Edinburgh ; the Bailie answers for them, and gives the Commissioners of Police ; the Chairman answers for them, and gives some other officials ; every public body in the city, from the University to the Potterow Friendly Society, is toasted and responded for by one and another. Then come

individuals : a croupier proposes the Chairman, the Chairman proposes the croupiers ; the other croupier proposes the ex-resident commissioner of police for the next ward. Amidst the storm of civic toasts a little thickish man, with a faded velvet waistcoat and strong-ale nose, rises solemnly and reminds the company of a remarkable omission : "Some, perhaps, are not aware of an incident of a very interesting nature which has taken place in the family of one of our worthy croupiers this morning [him of the swelling title, Moderator of the Society of High Constables]. It has not yet been announced in the papers : I need only say, 'Mrs. Gray, of a daughter.' (Cheering from all parts of the house.) On such an occasion, gentlemen, you will not think me unreasonable if I ask you to get up, and drink, with all the honours, a bumper to Mrs. Gray and her sweet and interesting charge." (Drunk with wild joy by all present.)

Hitherto the literary and professional friends of Hogg have been overwhelmed and stuffed by the roaring, ramping deluge of shopkeeping Bumbledom. About two, after the second reckoning has been called and paid by general contribution, Heaven be praised ! the Chairman retires, and a young advocate takes his place ; then the croupiers and other citizenly men glide off ; the mirth increases, the thinned company gathers in a serried cluster of intense fun and good-fellowism around the chair. Hogg now for the first time shines out in all his lustre ; tells stories, sings, and makes all life and glee. "Laird o' Lamington," the "Women Folk," and "Paddy O'Rafferty," he gives with irresistible force and fire. About this time,

however, the reporters (*i.e.*, R. C.) withdrew, so that it is not in our power to state any further particulars of the Candlemaker Row Festival.

And so farewell to the sweet-voiced, guileless, warm-hearted Shepherd.

## NOTES ON THE GENIUS OF ROBERT BROWNING \*

- 1.—Browning's *Variety and Knowledge*.—2. *The Charge of Obscurity*.—3. *The Charge of Harshness, and of Affectation, which really means Naturalness*.—4. *Browning's Activity and Rapidity*.—5. *Browning's Manliness*.—6. *Browning's Vitality*.—7. *Browning's Christianity*.

1. Browning's *Variety and Knowledge*. Perhaps a reader looking for the first time through Browning's volumes would be first struck by the remarkable number and variety of his works, though these now cover a period of fifty years. On a somewhat closer acquaintance, this reader would surely be impressed with an ever-increasing astonishment at the prodigious amount and variety of knowledge brought to bear upon so vast a range of subjects. I mean not only, nor even mainly, knowledge of literature and art, but also what I may term knowledge of things in general. Marvellous as his acquirements in the former kinds must appear to one who, like myself, is neither scholar nor connoisseur, I am yet more overwhelmed by the immensity of his acquisitions in this other kind, by what Mr. Swinburne has happily summed up as "the inexhaustible stores of his

\* Read at the Third Meeting of the Browning Society, on Friday, January 27, 1882.

perception." Not all of us have the opportunity of mastering the contents of libraries and museums and art-galleries; but all of us have the opportunity of mastering the common facts of nature and human life; yet it is precisely in these departments of knowledge that Browning's pre-eminence appears to me most decided. With the great majority of us the senses are dull, the perceptions slow and vague and confused; Browning drinks in the living world at every pore. There exist, in fact, some men so rarely endowed that their minds are as revolving mirrors, which, without effort, reflect clearly everything that passes before them and around them in the world of life, and without effort retain all the images constantly ready for use; while we ordinary men can only with fixed purpose and long endeavour catch and keep some very small fragments of the whole. Chaucer, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Goethe, Scott, Balzac, are familiar examples of this quietly rapacious, indefinitely capacious acquisitiveness, men of whom we can say, "They have learned everything and forgotten nothing;" and the star of Browning is of the first magnitude in this constellation.

2. *Charge of Obscurity*.—But we have heard of great scholars who could only communicate a plentiful lack of ideas in many languages, of very learned men who were simply Dryasdusts, of people with keen perceptiveness and tenacious memories, whose minds or no-minds were of the Dame Quickly order; though I do not remember any combination of both the scholar and the keen retentive observer with the dullard. The heaped-up knowledge is as heaped-up fuel: the questions occur, Is the fire intense enough to kindle

the whole mass through and through into clear glow of light and heat? or but strong enough to smoulder smokily under it? or so relatively weak as to be crushed out by it? Here the admirers of Browning directly join issue with the common critics, and the public led or misled by them, who assert that his fire is of the second or smoky species. As he himself puts it with humorous contempt in the *Pacchiarotto* (1876):—

“Then he who directed the measure—  
 An old friend—put leg forward nimbly,  
 ‘We critics as sweeps out your chimbley!  
 Much soot to remove from your flue, sir,  
 Who spares coals in kitchen, an’t you, sir.  
 And neighbours complain it’s no joke, sir,  
 —You ought to consume your own smoke, sir.’  
 ‘Ah, rogues, but my housemaid suspects you,  
 Is confident oft she detects you  
 In bringing more filth into my house  
 Than ever you found there!—I’m pious,  
 However: ’twas God made you dingy.’”

I shall not attempt to argue this issue here, as Mr. Swinburne, in his excellent Critical Essay on George Chapman, has discussed it with admirable power and eloquence, and to my mind conclusively, in general vindication of the great poet against the small critics “as sweeps out his chimbley.” I will venture to add but one remark of my own on this matter. Many years since, in 1864 or ’65, I wrote: “Robert Browning, a true and splendid genius, though his vigorous and restless talents often overpower and run away with his genius, so that some of his creations are left but half-retrieved from chaos.” This now seems to me put much too strongly, save perhaps in reference to “Sordello” and a very few of the minor poems; but I



still think that it points to a real fault in his art—a fault, however, be it observed, of overplus, not of insufficiency. Such overpowering talents are almost as rare as the sometimes overpowered genius. Landor, writing, it is true, about twenty years earlier, said similarly of Browning: “I only wish he would atticise a little. Few of the Athenians had such a quarry on their property, but they constructed better roads for the conveyance of the material.” And such comments but mark what Coleridge has noted in a certain stage of the development of Shakespeare: “The intellectual power and the creative energy wrestle as in a war-embrace.” And the wrestling is mighty when both the athletes are Titanic.

Admitting that “Sordello” is very hard, if not obscure, I would observe that the difficulty is not so much in the mere language, as in the abrupt transitions, the rapid discursions, and the continual recondite allusions to matters with which very few readers can be familiar.\* The yet young fire, struggling with its enormous mass of gnarled and intertangled fuel, burns murkily with fitful sheets of splendid flame, and the mass of metal is not thoroughly fused for the mould; the result differing herein decisively from the magnificent Sordello of the *Purgatorio* (vi.), defined, solid, massive, as if cast colossal in bronze, the most superb figure, I think, in all Dante; him who leaps from his haughty impassibility to embrace Virgil at the one word “Mantuan,” kindling the Florentine to the fulgurant invective, *Ahi serva Italia*; the Sordello of that noble passage, not to be rendered into English:—

\* Mr. J. T. Nettleship gives a very careful analysis of it in his volume.

“ Ma vedi là un anima che posta  
Sola soletta versa noi riguarda ;  
Quella ne'nsegnerà la via più tosta.

Venimmo a lei : O anima Lombarda,  
Come ti stavi altera e disdegnosa,  
E nel mover degli occhj onesta e tarda !

Ella non ci diceva alcuna cosa,  
Ma laciavene gir, solo guardando  
A guisa di leon quando si posa.”

“ But look and mark that spirit posted there  
Apart, alone, who gazes as we go ;  
He will instruct us how we best may fare.

We came to him : O Lombard spirit, lo,  
What pride and scorn thy bearing then expressed,  
The movement of thine eyes how firm and slow !

No word at all he unto us addressed,  
But let us pass, only regarding still  
In manner of a lion when at rest.”

Yet no good judge who watched how strenuously this still youthful genius was wrestling with the difficult and almost indomitable subject-matter of “Sordello” could help foreseeing its triumphant mastery over whatever it might undertake when its slow strong growth should be fully mature. To my mind this thorough maturity was reached in the two volumes of “Men and Women,” published in 1855. There had been previous poems mature as well as great ; but in this collection, distributed under various headings in the six-volume edition of 1868, I found, and find, *all* the leading pieces mature ; the fire burns intensely clear, completely consuming its own smoke.

To name a score of the fifty: "Karshish" and "Cleon," "Andrea del Sarto" and "Fra Lippo Lippi," "A Toccata of Galuppi's," "Bishop Blougram," "In a Balcony," "Childe Roland," "Two in the Campagna," "A Serenade at the Villa," "Memorabilia," "Respectability," "Instans Tyrannus," "Holy Cross Day," "The Statue and the Bust," "Evelyn Hope," "The Guardian Angel," "By the Fireside" (whose Greek promise has already been so amply fulfilled), "Any Wife to any Husband," "One Word More," and, higher than the rest, as its hero was higher than any of the people from the shoulders and upward, the complete "Saul;" these are not only noble in conception and aspiration, they are each in its befitting style consummate in achievement; not one of them unworthy of a great country's greatest living poet. Of the wonderful works that have followed I need not say anything here, not even of that stupendous masterpiece, "The Ring and the Book," concerning which I have recently had the opportunity of saying something elsewhere.\*

3. *Charge of Harshness*.—Allied to the common charge of obscurity is that of harshness, variously attributed to negligence, wilfulness, lack of inborn melody and harmony; or, as I have been somewhat surprised to hear pretty often, deliberate affectation, this last evil propensity being made responsible for the obscurity also. As to the negligence and wilfulness, Browning has himself told us that he has always done his best; and I, for one, would take his word, even did I not find it—as I do find it—manifestly confirmed by the sincerity, the earnestness, the

\* *Gentleman's Magazine*, December 1881.

thoroughness of all his work. As to the lack of innate melody and harmony, how can such a charge be maintained in the face of the poems just cited, not to mention others later and still greater? But let us distinguish. His strong, intensely original, and many-sided individuality has, among finer savours, a keen relish for the odd, the peculiar, the quaint, the grotesque; and when these offer themselves in the subject-matter, his guiding genius is apt to throw the reins on the necks of the vigorous talents and eager perceptions, which run risky riot in language as quaint and grotesque as the theme. Students will recall *Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis*, "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha," "Old Pictures at Florence," the Lawyers in "The Ring and the Book." Let us admit further that, perhaps too often and inopportunately, a perplexing patter or harsh jingle has irresistible seduction for him. Thus, such lines as—

"While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks  
Through the chinks,"

cruelly remind one of "Peter Piper picked a peck of pepper;" and the second, third, and fourth stanzas in "Mesmerism," clever and true as they are in themselves, appear to me not only incongruous with the main theme, but absolutely untrue in relation to the speaker, who, with his whole mind absorbed in his self-set task, would not have noticed the petty distractions they describe. For other instances I need but mention "Waring," "Christmas Eve," and the "Flight of the Duchess;" in which last splendidly original and vigorous poem, by the way, while much of the audacious grotesque of the diction is consonant

with the rough forester who tells the story, much is quite incompatible with him.

In many of these cases it may be fairly contended on behalf of the poet, that he but asserts and vindicates his own artistic sovereignty over the subject by holding it aloof and beneath him, by now and then good-naturedly laughing at it, as Richter, I think, says one must be able to laugh at or sport with one's faith in order to really possess it.

But whatever may be the ultimate judgment on this matter, it may be fearlessly affirmed that whenever the subject is so great and solemn as to possess the poet, instead of him possessing it, be its supremacy of terror or pathos, beauty or awe, he ever rises in expression as in conception with his theme; and he has a most noble natural affinity with noble themes. Then not the mere talents or the piercing perceptions are in the ascendant, but the Divine genius holds imperial sway; then pure imagination, or imaginative reason, or imaginative passion, incarnates itself in its own proper language of majestic rhythm, tenderest melody, orchestral harmony—orchestral because comprehensive and manifold with the complex simplicity and integrity of a high organism. For the rest, we do not in the grandeur of fortress or cathedral look for the minute finish and polish of carvings in gems or ivory.

*Affectation means Naturalness.*—Lastly, as to the affectation, I have come to learn that it usually means, when objected, even by persons of superior intelligence, against any great artist of whatever kind, the direct contrary of what it is commonly supposed to mean. It means that he is supremely and exquisitely *un-*affected, being scrupulously true to his own individu-

ality. It means that he wears the garb befitting his peculiar stature and complexion, and does not affect the passing fashions which uniform the undistinguished multitudes. If he is a writer or orator, it means that he stamps with vigorous clearness his own image and superscription on his word-mintage; affirming thus his true sovereign prerogative, instead of issuing the common currency with the common image and superscription half-effaced by multitudinous usage, not to speak of debasement by sweating and clipping—the demonetised, vulgarised vocabulary of the newspapers.

Browning himself expresses just as much esteem for the public that accuses him of harshness as for the critics who accuse him of obscurity. In the Epilogue to the *Pacchiarotto* volume (1876), written in the same spirit as a certain famous high-minded Ode to Himself by Ben Jonson, he bursts out with jolly scorn:—

“ ’Tis said I brew stiff drink,

But the deuce a flavour of grape is there.

Don't nettles make a broth

Wholesome for blood grown lazy and thick?

Maws out of sorts make mouths out of taste.

My Thirty-four Port—no need to waste

On a tongue that's fur, and a palate paste!

A magnum for friends who are sound! the sick—

I'll posset and cosset them, nothing loth,

Henceforward with nettle-broth!”

Yet he could write in the Preface to the “Selections,” dated May, 1872: “Nor do I apprehend any more charges of being wilfully obscure, unconscientiously careless, or perversely harsh.”

4. *Activity and Rapidity*.—Let us now consider some of the dominant characteristics of this wonderful genius, as manifested in its slowly developed, long-enduring maturity.

First, one cannot help remarking the restless activity and almost unique rapidity of his intellect. Swift and keen as are his perceptions, his thoughts are swifter and keener yet. We ordinary readers are soon breathless in trying to keep up with them, and must be content to travel with relays, by easy stages, the journeys he makes at a single rush. As Mr. Swinburne excellently puts it, "He never thinks but at full speed; and the rate of his thought is to that of another man's as the speed of a railway to that of a waggon, or the speed of a telegraph to that of a railway." As I have had occasion to remark elsewhere, these analogies are peculiarly felicitous, inasmuch as the railway train not only runs ten times faster than the waggon, but also carries more than ten times the weight; the telegraph is not only incomparably swifter than the railway, but also incomparably more subtle and pregnant with intellect and emotion. The restless activity and rapidity and subtlety of intellect which confound the "general reader" (who has been termed the laziest and haziest of human animals), accustomed to the too-easy sauntering through popular novels and periodicals, are apt at first to perplex even the student, as perturbing the exquisite calm of the simply idyllic conceptions with which he has been familiarised by less intellectual poets. As our French neighbours say, "one must have the defect of one's qualities;" and in Browning these mental

qualities or faculties are so pre-eminently rare and valuable, so delightful and informing and suggestive, that an intelligent and athletic student soon willingly surrenders the serenest tranquillity in order to pursue their subtle and multiplex workings, finding this pursuit an intellectual gymnastic of the most exhilarating as well as bracing character. (But it must be always remembered that when Browning sets himself to a task of pure and lofty imaginative-ness—as in the “Saul,” the “Serenade at the Villa,” the “Childe Roland,” “Any Wife to Any Husband,” “One Word More,” or on a larger scale in the pre-*vision* of the tragedy of “The Ring and the Book,” or the Caponsacchi, Pompilia, and Pope sections—his imagination, kindling in the measure of the greatness of its theme, and so (as I have said) kindling and glorifying his style, is as intense, solemn, steadfast, irresistibly dominant, I will dare to assert, as the noblest in all our noble literature.

Heine says in one of his rough jottings, “Shakespeare’s big toe contained more poetry than all the Greek poets, with the exception of Aristophanes. The Greeks were great Artists, not Poets; they had more artistic sense than poetry.” The same may be fairly said of many modern distinguished writers of verse, if poetry be regarded as the reflection at once intelligent and beautiful of the whole world of nature and human nature; or, lyrically, of the singer’s whole inner nature in relation to the outer world, and not merely of certain choice “bits” or dreamy moods. Now, this comprehensiveness, this sleepless intimate interest in the whole world of life around him, both the interior and exterior life, in all their kinds and



degrees, which we find supreme in Shakespeare, is to my apprehension equally supreme in Browning; and it embraces the past no less than the present, and, what is even more rare in one so learned, the present no less than the past. For the present, he himself specially notes it in "How it strikes a Contemporary;" and Landor long since noted it in the keen-eyed genial observer:—

"Browning! Since Chaucer was alive and hale,  
No man hath walkt along our roads with step  
So active, so inquiring eye, or tongue  
So varied in discourse."

For the past, Browning early avowed it in the personal digression in "Sordello":—

" . . . Beside, care-bit erased  
Broken-up beauties ever took my taste  
Supremely " (p. 101).

And as to the interior life, we have also his own avowal in the letter of dedication prefixed to "Sordello," twenty-five years after the poem was written:—

"The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires; and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul; little else is worth study."

But we need neither the testimony of others nor his own avowals on these points, so conspicuously illustrated throughout his books. For the past, besides the greatest, from *Paracelsus* through "The Ring and the Book" to "Aristophanes' Apology," we

have in addition to poems already mentioned such pieces as "The Bishop orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's" (in which Ruskin finds embodied the very spirit of the Renaissance;—I would modify, of one phase, and that the least noble, of it), "The Grammarian's Funeral" (embodying another and far nobler phase), "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha," "Pictor Ignotus," "Old Pictures at Florence," "The Heretic's Tragedy"—which, as the cheerful case of burning the Grand Master of the Templars alive, an astonishing Edinburgh reviewer complained was not rendered in a pleasing manner! For the present, we have such pieces as "The Lost Leader," "The Italian in England" and "The Englishman in Italy," the noble "Home Thoughts from the Sea," "Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr," the unique "Waring," "Mesmerism," "Bishop Blougram," "Caliban on Setebos," "Sludge the Medium," in addition to such longer works as "Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day," "Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau," "Red-Cotton Nightcap-Country," "The Inn Album." And throughout all we have ever the dominant theme of the development or revelation of human souls; naturally most wonderful, and to myself simply overwhelming, in his immense masterpiece, "The Ring and the Book." In his power of transcendent analysis interfused with the power of synthetic exposition, so that we have no dissection of corpses, but an intellectual and moral vivisection, whose subjects grow the more living in their reality the more keenly the scalpel cuts into them, the more thoroughly they are anatomised, I know not of any contemporaries who can be compared with him save Balzac, Victor Hugo,

Gustave Flaubert (in "Madame Bovary"), George Meredith (as in "Emilia in England," and "The Egoist"). Carlyle, in his "French Revolution," delights in sneering at "Victorious Analysis;" here is Victorious Analysis in a very real sense commanding the extreme opposite of sneers.

5. *Manliness*.—Further, Browning's passion is as intense, noble, and manly as his intellect is profound and subtle and therefore original. I would especially insist on its manliness, because our present literature abounds in so-called passion, which is but half-sincere or wholly insincere sentimentalism, if it be not thinly disguised prurient lust, and in so-called pathos, which is maudlin to nauseousness. The great unappreciated poet last cited has defined passion as *noble strength on fire*; and this is the true passion of great natures and great poets; while sentimentalism is ignoble weakness dallying with fire; and mere lust, even in novels written by "ladies" for Society with the capital S, is mere brutishness. Browning's passion is of utter self-sacrifice, self-annihilation, self-vindicated by its irresistible intensity. So we read it in "Time's Revenges," so in the scornful condemnation of the weak lovers in "The Statue and the Bust," so in "In a Balcony," and "Two in the Campagna," with its—

"Infinite passion, and the pain  
Of finite hearts that yearn."

Is the love rejected, unreturned? No weak and mean upbraidings of the beloved, no futile complaints; a solemn resignation to immitigable Fate; intense gratitude for inspiring love to the unloving beloved.

So in "A Serenade at the Villa ;" so in "One Way of Love," with its—

"My whole life long I learned to love.  
This hour my utmost art I prove  
And speak my passion.—Heaven or Hell?  
She will not give me Heaven? 'Tis well!  
Lose who may—I still can say,  
Those who win Heaven, blest are they!"

So in "The Last Ride Together," with its—

"I said—Then, dearest, since 'tis so,  
Since now at length my fate I know,  
Since nothing all my love avails,  
Since all my life seemed meant for fails,  
Since this was written and needs must be—  
My whole heart rises up to bless  
Your name in pride and thankfulness!  
Take back the hope you gave,—I claim  
Only a memory of the same."

With a masculine soul for passion, a masculine intellect for thought, and a masculine genius for imagination, all on a vast scale, and all fused together in one intense fire when the theme is great and imperious, we have the highest results of which poetry is capable; and such results I recognise in the noblest poems and passages of Browning as authentic and impressive as in the noblest in our literature; supreme by magnificence of scope in his supreme work, "The Ring and the Book," but stamped with the same sterling mint-mark in many of the shorter pieces in addition to those already cited, and expressed in his own person in that surpassing "One Word More," to E. B. B. alive, which summed up the "Men and

Women," and the fervent invocations to E. B. B. dead, which open and close "The Ring and the Book." Never surely nobler love through life and death than that which inspired these in the man, and the "Sonnets from the Portuguese" in the woman.

6. *Vitality*.—Browning's immense range and depth of sympathy or geniality, which has been rightly considered as of the essence of great genius, is naturally united if not identical with an intense and exuberant vitality, that "manly relish of life" which Lamb so well notes in Fielding; and this is all the more remarkable in these days, when so much of our poetic literature, whether in verse or prose, is, like Hamlet, "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought," or altogether divorced and alien from the real living world. It does not come home to men's business and bosoms, so its cultivators and students are but a very small class apart, and, it must be admitted, not generally of robust natures. For myself, I have frequently been constrained to reflect, How small and weak are the singing birds! Browning, on the contrary, is one of the most robust of natures; nothing alive, or that has lived, is indifferent to him; there is no problem of life or death with which he fears to grapple; he has vital affinities with all things; and his genius appears but to grow in geniality, in hearty and manly relish of life, as he grows in age. He has, indeed, accumulated such inexhaustible stores of knowledge and thought that he seems of late years more and more hurrying to disburthen himself ere the inevitable end shall arrive. For his indestructible vital interest in the living world and hearty relish of life, take "At the Mermaid," in the Pacchiarotto

volume of 1876 (a volume I refer to specially because in it he speaks more in his own person than he permitted himself to do in any preceding book):—

“Have you found your life distasteful?  
 My life did and does smack sweet.  
 Was your youth of pleasure wasteful?  
 Mine I saved, and hold complete.  
 Do your joys with age diminish?  
 When mine fail me, I'll complain.  
 Must in death your daylight finish?  
 My sun sets to rise again.

“I find earth not gray but rosy,  
 Heaven not grim but fair of hue.  
 Do I stoop? I pluck a posy.  
 Do I stand and stare? All's blue.”

And more recently still, in “The Two Poets of Croisic,” 1878:—

“Dear, shall I tell you? There's a simple test  
 Would serve when people take on them to weigh  
 The worth of poets, ‘Who was better, best,  
 This, that, the other bard?’ (bards none gainsay  
 As good, observe! no matter for the rest)  
 ‘What quality preponderating may  
 Turn the scale as it trembles?’ End the strife  
 By asking ‘Which one led a happy life?’

“If one did, over his antagonist  
 That yelled or shrieked or sobbed or wept or wailed  
 Or simply had the dumps,—dispute who list,—  
 I count him victor.”

A test fatal to the supremacy of not a few of the very greatest, as Jesus, Dante, Shakespeare, Pascal, Burns, Shelley, Keats, Leopardi, but which certainly reveals the nature of the poet who chooses it.

7. *Christianity*.—Finally, I must not fail to note, as one of the most remarkable characteristics of his genius, his profound, passionate, living, triumphant faith in Christ, and in the immortality and ultimate redemption of every human soul in and through Christ. For the last point I need but cite “Apparent Failure,” where, referring to the three suicides whose corpses he once gazed upon in the Paris Morgue, he declares :—

“ I thought, and think, their sin’s atoned ; ”

and concludes :—

“ My own hope is, a sun will pierce  
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched ;  
That, after Last, returns the First,  
Though a wide compass round be fetched ;  
That what began best, can’t end worst,  
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.”

Thoroughly familiar with all modern doubts and disbeliefs, he tramples them all under foot, clinging to the Cross ; and this with the full co-operation of his fearless reason, not in spite of it and by its absolute surrender or suppression. A most interesting and valuable essay might be written by an impartial and competent student on the problem, How can Browning be a Christian ? but this is scarcely the place for such a discussion. I am not here to argue matters of religion ; I am simply taking account of an indubitable and in the highest degree noteworthy fact. It may be objected that if the processes by which he attains and justifies his belief are essential to the belief, there can be but very few real Christian

believers, since scarcely one man in ten thousand could master these processes, much less originate them; but the objection would equally apply in the case of any profound and subtle thinker and his doctrines in any department of thought. For us ordinary men the cardinal fact is, that such and such a theory or doctrine was found probable, tenable, reasonable, or irresistible, by such and such a profound and subtle and dauntless and sincere thinker. The wise and the simple, nay, the various wise and the various simple, never tread the same path to the same goal; but for common purposes we must class together all those who *do* reach the same goal; and each goal, be it Christianity, or Copernicanism, or Comtism, is entitled to respect in proportion to the aggregate worth (not number) of those who have reached and rested in it.

In Browning we find reverence and audacity co-equal and co-efficient; and doubtless many timid Christians have been shocked by his free handling of their religion in the "Christmas Eve" and the "Easter-Day;" but candid Non-Christians (among whom I am fain to be classed) cannot but recognise and esteem the fearless and fervent Christianity of those poems, cannot but thoroughly admit the great poet's burning sincerity when he cries at the close of the former:—

" I have done : and if any blames me,  
Thinking that merely to touch in brevity  
The topics I dwell on were unlawful,—  
Or worse, that I trench, with undue levity,  
On the bounds of the holy and the awful,—  
I praise the heart, and pity the head of him,



And refer myself to **THEE**, instead of him,  
Who head and heart alike discernest,  
Looking below light speech we utter,  
When frothy spume and frequent sputter  
Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest !  
May truth shine out, stand ever before us !"

There is indeed one remarkable passage in one of his latest works, "La Saisiaz" (1878), wherein he plunges into the unfathomable abyss of the Everlasting No ; but from this he retrieves himself with triumphant emphasis in the Everlasting Yes. For the rest, the devout and hopeful Christian faith, explicitly or implicitly affirmed in such poems as "Saul," "Karshish," "Cleon," "Caliban upon Setebos," "A Death in the Desert," "Instans Tyrannus," "Rabbi Ben Ezra," "Prospice," the "Epilogue," and throughout that stupendous monumental work, "The Ring and the Book," must surely be clear as noonday to even the most purblind vision.

To summarise : I look up to Browning as one of the very few men known to me by their works who, with most cordial energy and invincible resolution, have lived thoroughly throughout the whole of their being, to the uttermost verge of all their capacities, in his case truly colossal ; lived and wrought thoroughly in sense and soul and intellect ; lived at home in all realms of nature and human nature, art and literature : whereas nearly all of us are really alive in but a small portion of our so much smaller beings, and drag wearily toward the grave our for the most part dead selves, dead from the suicidal poison of misuse and atrophy of disuse. Confident and rejoicing in the storm and stress of the struggle, he has conquered

life instead of being conquered by it; a victory so rare as to be almost unique, especially among poets in these latter days. When the end comes, which must come, he can well say with his friend Landor, that "indomitable old Roman":—

" I strove with none, for none was worth my strife ;  
Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art :  
I warmed both hands before the fire of Life ;  
It fails, and I am ready to depart ! "

And further, in the consummation of the faith of a lifetime, sing to the world :—

" Must in death your daylight finish ?  
My sun sets to rise again. "

And to his Belovèd gone before :—

" O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,  
And with God be the rest ! "

## “THE RING AND THE BOOK ”

CERTAIN rare works of literature, like others of art and philosophy, appear too gigantic to have been wholly wrought out each by the one man who we yet know did accomplish it unaided. Such a work reminds us of a great cathedral, which, even if ultimately finished in accordance with the plans of the supreme architect who designed it, could not be completed under his own supervision or during his own lifetime, being too vast and elaborate for fulfilment in a single generation. And as such a colossal work “The Ring and the Book ” has always impressed me ; and, indeed, without straining comparison, one may pursue with regard to it the suggestion of a great Gothic cathedral. For here truly we find the analogues of the soaring towers and pinnacles, the multitudinous niches with their statues, the innumerable intricate traceries, the gargoyles wildly grotesque ; and, within, the many-coloured light through the stained windows with the red and purple of blood predominant, the long pillared echoing aisles, the altar with its piteous crucifix and altar-piece of the Last Judgment, the organ and the choir pealing their *Miserere* and *De Profundis* and *In Excelsis Deo*, the side chapels, the confessionals, the fantastic wood-carvings, the tombs with their effigies sculptured

supine ; and beneath, yet another chapel, as of death, and the solemn sepulchral crypts. The counterparts of all this and all these, I dare affirm, may veritably be found in this immense and complicate structure, whose foundations are so deep and whose crests are so lofty. Only, as a Gothic cathedral has been termed a petrified forest, we must image this work as a vivified cathedral, thrilling hot swift life through all its “marble nerves” :—

“ It interpenetrates my granite mass ;  
Through tangled roots and trodden clay doth pass  
Into the utmost leaves and delicatest flowers ;  
Upon the winds, among the clouds, ’tis spread ;  
It wakes a life in the forgotten dead,—  
They breathe a spirit up from their obscurest bowers.’

We have all often read the anecdote of Newton, so told as to imply that the discovery of the law of gravitation was owing to the accidental arrest of his attention by the accidental fall of an apple. But apples have fallen by myriads ever since Eve was tempted to eat of one in Eden ; yet we do not learn that any of them ever suggested that law until, in the garden at Woolsthorpe, one fell into a mind already teeming with meditations to the very verge of the discovery, and prepared to crystallise round *any* appropriate fact that should fall among them. Just so a certain square old yellow Book, a hundred and sixty-seven years old, small quarto size, with crumpled vellum covers, part print, part manuscript—print three-fifths, written supplement the rest—must have passed unsuggestive or unproductive through very many hands, and might have passed through millions

more without suggesting anything better than a little romance or a magazine article; but a great poet one fierce June day (in 1865, as I read) picks it up for a *lira*, eightpence English just, from among the old and new trash of a stall on a step of the Ricardi Palace in the Square of San Lorenzo, Florence. It thus falls into a heart and mind full of learning and knowledge, thought, insight, genius, intense human sympathy, which all leap to crystallise around it in most living crystallisation; and we have as result this stupendous poem, stupendous far more by quality than by quantity, though numbering over twenty thousand lines; a work destined to rank among the world's masterpieces—"The Ring and the Book."

Mr. Swinburne, in his fine Critical Essay on George Chapman, devotes several pages to the vindication of Browning from the common charge of obscurity; pages not really discursive, for they shed clear light upon the proper main theme. I am loth to mutilate such admirably proportioned eloquence; but as it appears to me no less just than eloquent in its insistence on certain dominant qualities of Browning's genius, I cannot refrain from citing a few of its salient sentences, while commending the whole to the study of the reader; for why put poorly in one's own words what has been already put richly in another's?

"Now, if there is any great quality more perceptible than another in Mr. Browning's intellect, it is his decisive and incisive faculty of thought, his sureness and intensity of perception, his rapid and trenchant resolution of aim. To charge him with obscurity is about as accurate as to call Lynceus purblind, or complain of the sluggish action of the telegraphic wire. He is something too much the reverse of obscure; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with

any certainty the track of an intelligence which moves with such incessant rapidity, or even to realise with what spider-like swift-ness and sagacity his building spirit leaps and lightens to and fro and backward and forward, as it lives along the animated line of its labour, springs from thread to thread, and darts from centre to circumference of the glittering and quivering web of living thought, woven from the inexhaustible stores of his perception, and kindled from the inexhaustible fire of his imagination. He never thinks but at full speed ; and the rate of his thought is to that of another man's as the speed of a railway to that of a waggon, or the speed of a telegraph to that of a railway. It is hopeless to enjoy the charm or to apprehend the gist of his writings except with a mind thoroughly alert, an attention awake at all points, a spirit open and ready to be kindled by the contact of the writer's : . . . we have but to come with an open and pliant spirit, untired and undisturbed by the work or the idleness of the day, and we cannot but receive a vivid and active pleasure in following the swift and fine radiations, the subtle play and keen vibration of its sleepless fires ; and the more steadily we trace their course the more surely do we see that these forked flashes of fancy and changing lights of thought move unerringly around one centre, and strike straight in the end to one point.”

Now, if Mr. Swinburne is right, as in my judgment he certainly is, the dominant qualities he has affirmed will naturally be most conspicuous in Browning's greatest work. Let us now go back to the Book :—

“ ‘ *Romana Homicidiorum* ’—nay,  
Better translate—‘ A Roman murder-case :  
Position of the entire criminal cause  
Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman,  
With certain Four the cut-throats in his pay,  
Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death  
By heading or hanging as befitted ranks,  
At Rome on February Twenty-two,  
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety-eight :  
Wherein it is disputed if, and when,

Husbands may kill adulterous wives, yet 'scape  
The customary forfeit.'

Word for word,  
So ran the title-page : murder, or else  
Legitimate punishment of the other crime,  
Accounted murder by mistake,—just that  
And no more, in a Latin cramp enough  
When the law had her eloquence to launch,  
But interfilleted with Italian streaks  
When testimony stooped to mother-tongue,—  
That, was this old square yellow book about."

Having secured his prize, the poet at once began reading it, and read on, though his path grew perilous among the piles of straw-work, the multitudinous upholstery and cast clothes of the square :—

"Still I read on, from written title-page  
To written index, on, through street and street,  
At the Strozzi, at the Pillar, at the Bridge ;  
Till, by the time I stood at home again  
In Casa Guidi, by Felice Church,  
Under the doorway where the black begins  
With the first stone slab of the staircase cold,  
I had mastered the contents, knew the whole truth  
Gathered together, bound up in this book."

This was swift mastery, but swifter follows :—

"I fused my live soul and that inert stuff,  
Before attempting smithcraft, on the night  
After the day when—truth thus grasped and gained—  
The book was shut and done with and laid by."

He stepped out on the narrow terrace (to live in fame with Casa Guidi Windows—one house with a double immortality !) built over the street and opposite Felice Church, lighted for festival and filled with clear

chanting, while the heavens were yet glowing with golden sunset ; and there :—

“Over the roof o’ the lighted church I looked  
A bowshot to the street’s end, north away  
Out of the Roman gate to the Roman road  
By the river, till I felt the Apennine.”

And there and thence, already on that evening and night of the first day, the inert stuff fused into white heat, bloom-furnaced, in “the inexhaustible fire of his imagination,” not then restless, but settled into a most steadfast, intense, irresistible burning, it was given him to see plainly, “in clear dream and solemn vision,” all the scenes and actions and personages of the long-buried tragedy. In my narrow range of literature I know not any instance, not in Shakespeare or Shelley, not in Dante or Leopardi, not in Blake undiseased or Browning’s own “Saul,” more impressive and authentic of rapt prophetic possession and inspiration, the radiant trance whose sight pierces and strains into foresight, than is revealed in the marvellous passage from line 500 to line 660 in the first section, which bears the title of the whole poem. After full study and absorption of this overmastering vision, which was also pre-vision, one is prepared for whatever of astonishing the mass of the work may consist of or contain. Here is the opening of the vision :—

“And there would lie Arezzo, the man’s town,  
The woman’s trap and cage and torture-place,  
Also the stage where the priest played his part,  
A spectacle for angels,—ay, indeed,  
There lay Arezzo ! Farther then I fared,  
Feeling my way on through the hot and dense,



Romeward, until I found the wayside inn  
 By Castelnuovo's few mean hut-like homes  
 Huddled together on the hill-foot bleak,  
 Bare, broken only by that tree or two  
 Against the sudden bloody splendour poured  
 Cursewise in his departure by the day  
 On the low house-roof of that squalid inn  
 Where they three for the first time and the last,  
 Husband and wife and priest, met face to face.  
 Whence I went on again, the end was near,  
 Step by step, missing none and marking all,  
 Till Rome itself, the ghastly goal, I reached.  
 Why, all the while,—how could it otherwise?—  
 The life in me abolished the death of things,  
 Deep calling unto deep : as then and there  
 Acted itself over again once more  
 The tragic piece. I saw with my own eyes  
 In Florence as I trod the terrace, breathed  
 The beauty and the fearfulness of night,  
 How it had run, this round from Rome to Rome."

For the supposed parents of the young wife Pompilia lived at Rome, whence Guido, having married her for their money, took her and them to his native Arezzo. They, finding how they had been trapped, contrived somehow to escape to Rome, leaving Pompilia to the tender mercies of Guido and his satyr-family.

" These I saw,  
 In recrudescency of baffled hate,  
 Prepared to wring the uttermost revenge  
 From body and soul thus left them : all was sure,  
 Fire laid and cauldron set, the obscene ring traced,  
 The victim stripped and prostrate : what of God ?  
 The cleaving of a cloud, a cry, a crash,  
 Quenched lay their cauldron, cowered i' the dust the crew,  
 As in a glory of armour like St. George,  
 Out again sprang the young good beauteous priest,  
 Bearing away the lady in his arms,  
 Saved for a splendid minute and no more."

The good young priest was Caponsacchi ; Pompilia got refuge with her putative parents, Pietro and Violante, in a solitary villa in a lone garden quarter ; eight months afterwards, at the new year, Guido and his four cut-throats killed all three, "aged, they, seventy each, and she seventeen," preserving only her two-weeks-old infant, who might bring their property into Guido's hands. The murderers were hotly pressed and captured that same night, tried, and condemned ; Guido, having taken minor orders many enough, claimed privilege of clergy, and appealed to the Pope, the good Pope Innocent XII. :—

"Innocent by name  
And nature too, and eighty-six years old,  
Antonio Pignatelli of Naples, Pope  
Who has trod many lands, known many deeds,  
Probed many hearts, beginning with his own,  
And now was far in readiness for God."

He, having mastered the whole case, confirmed the judgment, and with his own hand ordered execution on the morrow, Saturday, February 22, 1698. But let the poet himself relate the catastrophes as revealed to him in the vision :—

"But through the blackness I saw Rome again,  
And where a solitary villa stood  
In a lone garden quarter: it was eve,  
The second of the year, and oh so cold !  
Ever and anon there flittered through the air  
A snowflake, and a scanty couch of snow  
Crusted the grass-walk and the garden-mould.  
All was grave, silent, sinister,—when, ha ?  
Glimmeringly did a pack of were-wolves pad

2 G

The snow, those flames were Guido's eyes in front,  
And all five found and footed it, the track,  
To where a threshold-streak of warmth and light  
Betrayed the villa door with life inside,  
While an inch outside were those blood-bright eyes,  
And black lips wrinkling o'er the flash of teeth,  
And tongues that lolled—oh God, that madest man !  
They parleyed in their language. Then one whined—  
That was the policy and master-stroke—  
Deep in his throat whispered what seemed a name—  
'Open to Caponsacchi !' Guido cried :  
'Gabriel !' cried Lucifer at Eden-gate.  
Wide as a heart, opened the door at once,  
Showing the joyous couple, and their child  
The two-weeks' mother, to the wolves, the wolves  
To them. Close eyes ! And when the corpses lay  
Stark-stretched, and those the wolves, their wolf-work done,  
Were safe embosomed by the night again,  
I knew a necessary change in things ;  
As when the worst watch of the night gives way,  
And there comes duly, to take cognisance,  
The scrutinising eye-point of some star—  
And who despairs of a new daybreak now ?  
Lo, the first ray protruded on those five !  
It reached them, and each felon writhed transfixed.  
Awhile they palpitated on the spear  
Motionless over Tophet : stand or fall ?  
'I say, the spear should fall—should stand, I say !'  
Cried the world come to judgment, granting grace  
Or dealing doom according to world's wont,  
Those world's-bystanders grouped on Rome's cross-road  
At prick and summons of the primal curse  
Which bids man love as well as make a lie.  
There prattled they, discoursed the right and wrong,  
Turned wrong to right, proved wolves sheep and sheep wolves,  
So that you scarce distinguished fell from fleece ;  
Till out spoke a great guardian of the fold,  
Stood up, put forth his hand that held the crook,  
And motioned that the arrested point decline :  
Horribly off, the wriggling dead-weight reeled,  
Rushed to the bottom and lay ruined there."

But, the truth being thus grasped and gained—grasped as by an eagle’s talons, gained as by an eagle’s swoop—the whole drama clearly revealed to him on the very night of the day which brought him the book, the poet did not at once set his hand to the work of unfolding it :—

“Far from beginning with you London folk,  
I took my book to Rome first, tried truth’s power  
On likely people. ‘Have you met such names?  
Is a tradition extant of such facts?  
Your law-courts stand, your records frown a-row :  
What if I rove and rummage?’—‘Why, you’ll waste  
Your pains and end as wise as you began!’  
Every one snickered : ‘names and facts thus old  
Are newer much than Europe news we find  
Down in to-day’s *Diario*. Records, quotha?  
Why the French burned them, what else do the French?  
The rap-and-rending nation!’”

He likewise, as he tells us toward the end of the work, searched in vain for any record of the subsequent fate of Pompilia’s infant, Gaetano, who, six months after the execution, was decreed heir to his father Guido and to the putative maternal grandparents, and put under the guardianship of one Domenico Tighetti, chosen by Pompilia herself ere she died of her wounds; and by the same decree her fame was thoroughly established in law.

Not till he came to London did Browning take pen in hand, with Italy as clear in the eye of his mind as if present to his bodily eyes: well may Mr. Swinburne note “the inexhaustible stores of his perception” with “the inexhaustible fire of his imagination.” As we read in the opening section :—

“The Book ! I turn its medicinable leaves  
In London now till, as in Florence erst,  
A spirit laughs and leaps through every limb,  
And lights my eye, and lifts me by the hair,  
Letting me have my will again with these  
—How title I the dead alive once more ?”

And yet, when he has nearly finished the labour which he begins with such buoyant consciousness of strength :—

“ Swift as a spirit hastening to his task  
Of glory and of good,”

when, in his own words, the Ring is all but round and done—he can address the book as “my four-years’ intimate.” This immense work, charged and surcharged with learning, knowledge, ever-active subtle intellect, ever-vital passion, whether of sympathy or antipathy, ever-realising imagination, all thought out and wrought out in only four years !—the fact appears almost incredible to one whose mind moves at about the common sluggish rate. This poem, which, when I first studied it, grew beyond me and above me more and more with the profoundly impressive suggestion, still overawing, of a vast Gothic cathedral no single generation could accomplish ; which, at the most grudging estimate, is an achievement whereon, “itself by itself solely,” even a mighty artist could be content to challenge the ages, secure of a noble fame ; this, I found on nearing the end, had been all reared in such a small section of the architect’s life. The unpromising seed of an old yellow eightpenny book chanced to fall into the right rich soil, into the one mind and heart in the

world most proper to develop it to the uttermost, and in four brief years it had grown prodigiously, into this vivified cathedral, this immense perennial forest, abounding and superabounding with innumerably manifold life.

Pondering this, we can better appreciate one sentence I have quoted from Mr. Swinburne: “He never thinks but at full speed; and the rate of his thought is to that of another man’s as the speed of a railway to that of a waggon, or the speed of a telegraph to that of a railway.” And it should be noted that these analogies, like all that are genuine, imply more truths than the naked terms express; imply more than the mere statements of comparative rates of mental speed. In ordinary cases we are apt to judge, and judge correctly, that tongue or pen runs the more swiftly the less weight it carries; and our common phrases of “gift of the gab” or “gabble,” “itch of scribbling” or “scrawling,” mark our contempt for such worse than worthless fluency. But there are supereminent commanding exceptions. The railway train not only runs ten times faster than the waggon, but also carries more than ten times the weight; the telegraph is not only incomparably swifter than the railway, but also incomparably more subtle and pregnant with intellect and emotion; and thus it is with certain men of superlative genius in comparison, first, with us common plodders; and, secondly, with men of genius, lofty indeed, but not supreme. Their intellects are as the eyes of Friedrich pictured by Carlyle: “Such a pair of eyes as no man or lynx, or lion of that century bore elsewhere, according to all the testimony

we have.\* . . . Most excellent, potent, brilliant eyes, swift-darting as the stars, steadfast as the sun; grey, we said, of the azure-grey colour; large enough, not of glaring size; the habitual expression of them vigilance and penetrating sense, rapidity resting on depth." Or, as Heine measures their swiftness in the instance of Napoleon: "The great seven-league boot thoughts wherewith the genius of the Emperor invisibly overstrode the world; and I believe that any one of these thoughts would have given a German author ample material for writing his whole life long."

Having thus at the very opening let us fully into the secrets of the book, exposed the plot of the tragedy, portrayed the leading personages, sketched the course of the trial and appeal, and even reaffirmed emphatically on his own part the final judgment of the Pope; having, in brief, deliberately sacrificed all that he might have gained by a slowly evolved narrative, the interest of expectancy, surprise, suspense, doubt, fear, terror: what is left for the poet to tell us in the remaining twenty thousand lines? do we not already know the whole drama? Confident in his unparalleled resources, Browning at once proceeds to make us aware how he just begins where an ordinary poet would end. In the second half of the first section he lays before us the

\* But mark, among others, Scott on Burns: "I think his countenance was more massive than it looks in any of the portraits. . . . There was a strong expression of sense and shrewdness in all his lineaments; the eye alone, I think, indicated the poetical character and temperament. It was large and of a dark cast, and glowed (I say literally *glowed*) when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men in my time." Burns, though born forty-seven years after Friedrich, overlived him only about ten.

complete plan, copious in details, of the structure he is about to erect. He has already told us the story? Well, he simply purposes to tell it over again no fewer than ten times, from as many different points of view, by as many different types or persons less one—for Guido speaks twice, in hope before the appeal, in reckless desperation on the night before his execution. A work immeasurably difficult, yet most triumphantly achieved. The interest is to be purely psychological, but of psychology living, not dead; as with Balzac, the analysis by its unrelenting intensity and subtlety, sustained and impelled by an imagination no less intense, develops into vital synthesis; in each of the ten following sections Browning, having penetrated to the inmost soul of his creature, from that centre commands both soul and body to his service in complete self-revelation; so that we have ten monodramas, to use Mr. Swinburne's term, all on the same subject, but varying infinitely by the variance in the characters and circumstances of the speakers.

In the dedication of "Sordello," written twenty-five years after the poem itself, Browning says: "The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires; and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul; little else is worth study." And at the end of this Ring and Book he writes:—

"So did this old woe fade from memory,  
Till after, in the fulness of the days,  
I needs must find an ember yet unquenched,  
And, breathing, blow the spark to flame. It lives,  
If precious be the soul of man to man."



It lives, and is likely to live as long as any master-work of our generation.

First we are to hear how Half-Rome, with a typical worthy for its mouthpiece, found for Guido much excuse. Then how to the other Half-Rome, Pompilia seemed a saint and martyr both. Then :—

“ Hear a fresh speaker !—neither this nor that  
 Half-Rome aforesaid ; something bred of both :  
 One and one breed the inevitable three.  
 Such is the personage harangues you next ;  
 The elaborated product, *tertium quid* :  
 Rome’s first commotion in subsidence gives  
 The curd o’ the cream, flower o’ the wheat, as it were,  
 And finer sense o’ the city. . . .  
 . . . . .  
 What the superior social section thinks,  
 In person of some man of quality.”

These choric representatives are no mere abstract voices ; they and all their appropriate surroundings are realised, embodied, drawn and coloured with the like precision and clearness, the like fulness of characteristic detail, as the real persons and scenes of the drama. These actors follow ; first Count Guido before the governor and judges, doing his best man’s service for himself, in the guise of frank confession, wrung from him by—

“ His limbs’ late taste of what was called the cord,  
 Or Vigil-torture more facetiously.”

Caponsacchi comes next :—

“ Man and priest—could you comprehend the coil !—  
 In days when that was rife which now is rare.  
 . . . . .

Then a soul sighs its lowest and its last  
After the loud ones,—so much breath remains  
Unused by the four-days'-dying ; for she lived  
Thus long, miraculously long, 'twas thought,  
Just that Pompilia might defend herself.

How she endeavoured to explain her life.

Then since a Trial ensued, a touch o' the same  
To sober us, flustered with frothy talk,  
And teach our common sense its helplessness.  
For why deal simply with divining-rod,  
Scrape where we fancy secret sources flow,  
And ignore law, the recognised machine,  
Elaborate display of pipe and wheel  
Framed to unchoak, pump up and pour apace  
Truth in a flowery foam shall wash the world ?  
The patent truth-extracting process,—ha ?  
Let us make all that mystery turn one wheel,  
Give you a single grind of law at least !  
One orator of two on either side,  
Shall teach us the puissance of the tongue—  
That is o' the pen which simulated tongue—  
On paper."

For the pleadings were all in writing ; fortunately  
for the poet and ourselves, as they were thus preserved  
entire in the yellow book. So we next read :—

" How Don Giacinto of the Arcangeli,  
Called Procurator of the Poor at Rome,  
Now advocate for Guido and his mates,—  
How he turns, twists, and tries the oily thing  
Shall be—first speech for Guido 'gainst the Fisc."

And then :—

" Giovambattista o' the Battini, Fisc,  
Pompilia's patron by the chance of the hour,

To-morrow her persecutor,—composite, he,  
As becomes who must meet such various calls—

. . . . .  
How the Fisc vindicates Pompilia's fame."

Then we have the manner of the judgment of the  
Pope on the appeal :—

" Then must speak Guido yet a second time,  
Satan's old saw being apt here—skin for skin,  
All that a man hath will he give for life.  
While life was graspable and gainable, free  
To bird-like buzz her wings round Guido's brow,  
Not much truth stiffened out the web of words  
He wove to catch her : when away she flew  
And death came, death's breath rivelled up the lies,  
Left bare the metal thread, the fibre fine  
Of truth i' the spinning : the true words come last.  
How Guido, to another purpose quite,  
Speaks and despairs, the last night of his life,  
In that New Prison by Castle Angelo  
At the bridge-foot : the same man, another voice.

. . . . .  
The tiger-cat screams now, that whined before,  
That pried and tried and trod so gingerly,  
Till in its silkiness the trap-teeth join ;  
Then you know how the bristling fury foams."

The closing section, called "The Book and the Ring," is an epilogue corresponding to the prologue of "The Ring and the Book ;" each concluding with an impassioned apostrophe to the poet's Lyric Love, half angel and half bird, buried there in Florence some years before.

As I have said already, these iterations and reiterations of the same terrible story, told by so many typical and historical personages as beheld from so

many standpoints, are the very reverse of monotonous ; each new relation tends to deepen and expand the impression left by all that preceded it. The persistent repetition is as that of the smith's hammer-strokes welding the red-hot iron into shape, or rather as that of the principal theme in a great Beethoven fugue, growing ever more and more potent and predominant as its vast capabilities are more and more developed through countless intricate variations, and transmutations of time and key and structure and accompaniment. Only, to adequately evolve these capabilities, we must have the consummate master ; an imperial genius wielding unlimited resources ; an insuppressible, irresistible fire fed with inexhaustible fuel. I know of but one other living English poet to whom we can turn for the like supreme analytic synthesis, the patient analysis of a most subtle and unappeasable intellect, the organic synthesis of a most vivid and dramatic imagination ; which the better critics at length publicly recognised in the "Egoist," after almost ignoring or wholly underrating them in the "Modern Love," the "Ordeal of Richard Feverel," the "Emilia in England," the "Adventures of Harry Richmond," and other great original works of George Meredith.

Of course, I have no intention of reviewing in detail the several sections of this vast and multiplex achievement ; on which, as many commentaries might be written, and I humbly opine to somewhat better purpose, as the Germans have lavished upon Goethe's "Faust." Our professional judges have not been slow to acknowledge the chivalrous splendour of the Caponsacchi and the exquisite pathetic beauty of the Pompilia. Indeed, one may remark of Browning and

his Pompilia, as of Dante and his Beatrice, that whenever she is brought in, however austere or terrible or vile the surroundings, immediately an ineffable sweetness, a Divine tenderness, suffuses and thrills the verse. The marvellous power and insight of the two Guido sections have been equally acknowledged. The excellent critic of the *Westminster Review* gave his verdict against the couple devoted to the lawyers; "the malt is the best in England, but the beer is bad." In this I cannot concur. To me they represent the grinning gargoyles and grotesque carvings of the Gothic cathedral; the "noble grotesque" of Ruskin, the sport of a strong and earnest, not the serious business of a weak and frivolous mind. In the passage from which I have already quoted, Mr. Swinburne, referring to such pieces as the two Guidos, writes: "This work of exposition by soliloquy, and apology by analysis, can only be accomplished or undertaken by the genius of a great special pleader, able to fling himself with all his heart and all his brain, with all the force of his intellect and all the strength of his imagination, into the assumed part of his client; to concentrate on the cause in hand his whole power of illustration and illumination, and bring to bear upon one point at once all the rays of his thought in one focus." But what infinite contempt, genial and jolly in the first case, acrid in the other, Browning pours out upon these professional hireling special pleaders! His own object in such pieces as "Bishop Blougram's Apology," "Mr. Sludge, 'the Medium,'" the "Prince of Hohenstiel-Schwangau," is by no means to prove black white and white black, to make the worse appear the better reason, but to bring a seeming monster and

perplexing anomaly under the common laws of nature, by showing how it has grown to be what it is, and how it can with more or less of self-illusion reconcile itself to itself. The one great section to which I think less than justice has been done is that of the Pope, with its awful prelude :—

“ Ere I confirm or quash the Trial here  
Of Guido Franceschini and his friends,  
Read,—how there was a ghastly Trial once  
Of a dead man by a live man, and both, Popes :  
Thus—in the antique penman’s very phrase.”

I know nothing that surpasses the wisdom, the true saintliness, the invincible firmness of the great good old Pope in this decisive monologue.

An author whom we should love for that sole sentence, wrote of his wife, “To love her was a liberal education.” It would be scarcely rash to say the like of this one greatest work of our poet, who has wrought so much else that is only less great.

## BROWNING'S "PACCHIAROTTO" \*

MR. BROWNING, as he ages, seems but to work the more strenuously and produce the more abundantly, having, since the colossal "The Ring and the Book," issued no less than six volumes, of which two at least, "Balaustion's Adventure" and "Aristophanes' Apology," may be accounted of first-rate importance. He has accumulated such immense stores of knowledge, and much of it recondite knowledge, of literature, of art, and of things in general; he has gathered such wealth of manifold reflections on some of the abstrusest problems of life, that he appears to be anxious to disburthen himself of as much as possible ere death overtake him, that the treasures of his learning and thought may not perish with him. The present volume differs from the others of recent date in being written almost wholly in rhyme instead of blank verse, and differs from all previous ones in dealing much with personal matters, and these the author's relations to the public and the critics, instead of being mainly dramatic. During about thirty years the bulk of the critics pronounced him unintelligible,

\* "Pacchiarotto and How he Worked in Distemper: with other Poems." By Robert Browning. London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1876.

and the mass of the public ignored him, yet he possessed his soul in patience; but during the last dozen years or so the poor puzzled critics (I mean the professional book-tasters) have treated him with respect if not with understanding, and the poor bewildered public (I mean the small public that reads poetry) has looked into his books, though for the most part with glances of mere despair, yet now he bursts out upon both with almost savage scorn. One cannot say that he has no right to be angry, supposing that mere human stupidity ought ever to move to anger; one cannot help thinking that the anger is postdated. It would not have been surprising had he lashed out merrily and fiercely when a fatuous *Edinburgh Reviewer*, among other choice grievances, complained that he had not rendered the burning of the last Master of the Templars in a pleasing manner! But the time is past when any reviewers, *Edinburgh, Quarterly*, or other, could venture such imbecility; yet here we have the poet castigating them with a will :—

“ This Monday is—what else but May-day ;  
And these in the drabs, blues and yellows,  
Are surely the privileged fellows ;  
So, saltbox and bones, tongs and bellows !  
(I threw up the window) ‘ Your pleasure ? ’

“ Then he who directed the measure—  
An old friend—put leg forward nimbly,  
‘ We critics as sweeps out your chimbley !  
Much soot to remove from your flue, sir !  
Who spares coal in kitchen an’t you, sir !  
And neighbours complain it’s no joke, sir,  
—You ought to consume your own smoke, sir ! ’



Thus, instead of being at all penitent for the sins of harshness and obscurity of which he has been persistently accused from the appearance of "Sordello" even until now, he not only vindicates himself with a haughty and jovial self-confidence, but overwhelms his accusers with counter-charges of imbecility and humbug.

He moreover emphatically assures the public that it shall not penetrate into his inner personal history or nature; it may peep through his window, but shall not put foot over his threshold; he will not unlock his heart with a sonnet-key, and if Shakespeare did so he was thereby the less Shakespeare.

Another prominent feature in this book, and one which appears rather incongruous with the lip of scorn shot out at critics and public, is the lesson that it is no use trying to alter men, that it is best to let men remain as they are by nature, without troubling one's head with attempts to improve them. Thus:—

“ And as for Man—let each and all stick  
To what was prescribed them at starting !  
Once planted as fools—no departing  
From folly one inch, *seculorum*  
*In secula !* ”

And again:—

“ Only a learner,  
Quick one or slow one,  
Just a discernor,  
I would teach no one.  
I am earth's native :  
No re-arranging it !  
I be creative,  
Chopping and changing it ? ”

Lastly I must note the cordial love of life, and the cheerful confidence in death :—

“ Have you found your life distasteful ?  
 My life did and does taste sweet.  
 Was your youth of pleasure wasteful ?  
 Mine I saved and hold complete.  
 Do your joys with age diminish ?  
 When mine fail me, I'll complain.  
 Must in death your daylight finish ?  
 My sun sets to rise again.”

I have dwelt thus at length on these personal characteristics, not only because they are very interesting in themselves, on account of the greatness of the personality they help to characterise, but also because they have not, so far as I am aware, been so plainly discovered in any of the author's previous works. There is not space left to speak at all sufficiently, even were it in my power so to speak, of the impersonal or dramatic poems. Some of the shorter pieces are very fine, and two or three will take place with his best. Here is the shortest, entitled “ Magical Nature ” :—

“ Flower—I never fancied, jewel—I profess you !  
 Bright I see and soft I feel the outside of a flower,  
 Save but glow inside and—jewel, I should guess you,  
 Dim to sight and rough to touch : the glory is the dower.

“ You forsooth, a flower ? Nay, my love, a jewel—  
 Jewel at no mercy of a moment in your prime !  
 Time may fray the flower-face : kind be time or cruel  
 Jewel, from each facet, flash your laugh at time.”

There is a piece of grim ironical humour, “ Filippo Baldinucci on the Privilege of Burial,” turning on the

old persecution of the Jews, and similar in spirit to the "Holy Cross Day" in "Men and Women." The "Cenciaja" condenses from an old chronicle the story of that matricide by Paolo Santa Croce, which determined the execution of Beatrice Cenci when there was good hope that she would be pardoned. There is the spirited ballad of Hervé Riel, a true history, republished from the *Cornhill Magazine*. Lastly there are two pieces, "Numpholeptos" and "A Forgiveness," which it seems to me will rank not far beneath the loftiest of his poems of moderate length.

THE END

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